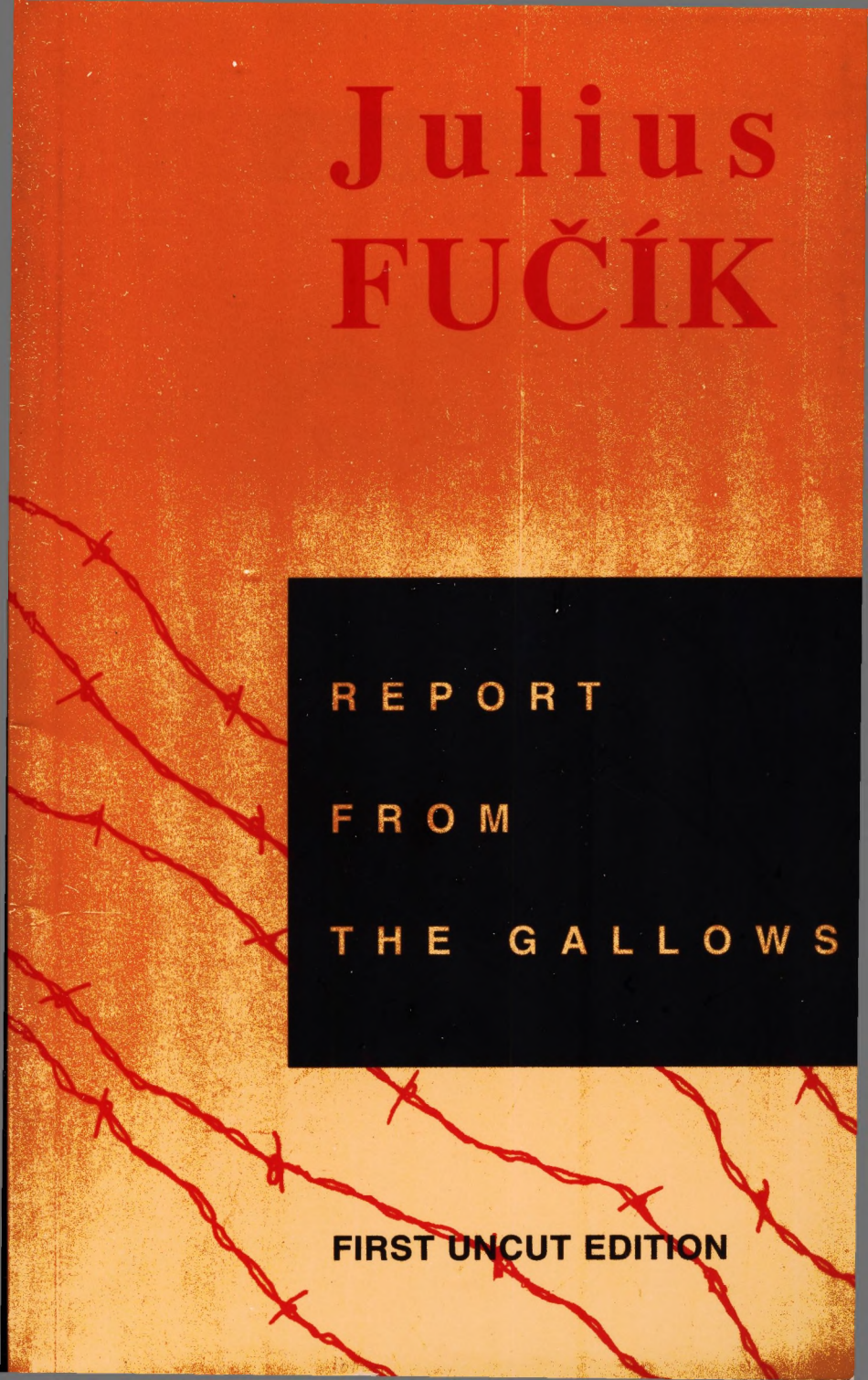
Julius FUČÍK



REPORT FROM THE GALLOWS

FIRST UNCUT EDITION

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JULIUS FUČÍK

REPORT FROM THE GALLOWS

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Julius Fučík

REPORT FROM THE GALLOWS

PRAGUE
SEPTEMBER 2000

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Translated from the Czech by Stephen Jolly,
Ken Biggs and Zdeněk Jumr.

This book is based on the expurgated 1951 edition of Fučík's work published by Fore Publications of London and the 1995 unexpurgated edition published in Czech by Torst of Prague.

Text printed in bold italics was omitted from the 1951 English–language edition. All footnotes are by the translaters.

The author's name is pronounced "Foo–cheek" with the stress on the first syllable.

A drawing of Fučík by the Czech artist Max Švabinský which he based on old photographs.

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FOREWORD

In one of her books, the English writer Iris Morley has written that "killing a man is not always the worst thing you can do to him." The Nazis were expert at worse things than killing, not only in the matter of body torture, but in the degradation, the corruption, and the mental reduction of a man. This was their weapon of superiority, for to be better than the Slavs, Jews, and Communists they listed as inferior, they first had to reduce them by brutality to physical and mental nothingness.

Yet there were many, many men whom the Nazis could never reduce, no matter how much they tore at the body and hacked at the mind. They beat and mentally blackmailed Julius Fučík by all the terror they knew, yet even when the mere skin was his body and the breath his only life, the hero of this book was their superior and their master, both mentally and physically. They could not reduce him; they could only kill him; and here, in these living words of Fučík's, you have his epitaph: his faith in men. Every word is written in the second-to-second wait for his execution, yet in every word of these notes Fučík keeps his amazing and complete compassion for people, and what is more, his understanding of them, even of his torturers.

Read this book, you Communists, you Socialists, you Tories. Then go out and walk the wonderful real pavements and ask yourselves what philosophy of life it was that kept this man's belief in himself and in other men.

Do not be afraid of the horror of this book, for you will put it down not thinking of its horrors, but of its hero: Fučík. He has left us his talisman for human dignity, and it is all heroic; so heroic that its tragic title is a very faint echo of its passionate content. In its essence, this book is not a report from the gallows at all. It is the cry of a victor.

James Aldridge (1951)

PREFACE

When I enthusiastically, but somewhat recklessly, promised Jack Lindsay* that I would write a brief introduction to the English edition of Julius Fučík's *Report from the Gallows*, I did not realise the difficulties of this task. How am I to write about a man who was so out-and-out Czech in the best sense of the word as Julius Fučík, and make him intelligible to the English reader? How was I to approach his personality so as to do justice to his inimitable characteristics? How was I to convey the charm, the greatness, and the sterling qualities which Fučík displayed? These were questions which caused me considerable concern, and made me hesitate for a long time before putting pen to paper. Finally I decided that the best method of introducing this outstanding book would be the simplest one, namely, to tell the reader the basic facts about the author's life, and to add my own testimony.

Well then, the life of Julius Fučík, literary critic and historian, born in Prague on February 23rd 1903, executed in Berlin on September 8th 1943, was the life of an intellectual who devoted himself heart and soul to promoting the interests of the working class. From his student years onwards Fučík worked as an agitator, organiser and writer to foster the idea of the Social Revolution in which he fanatically believed. He believed in it–as once F. X. Šalda, his older and jealously individualistic companion and teacher in the art of criticism angrily rebuked him–with a *foi d'un charbonnier*. As a journalist writing for the weekly

* *British writer and historian*

Tvorba (which Šalda, himself a non-Communist in a period of persecution of the Communist press, generously placed at his disposal), the dailies *Rudé Právo* and *Haló Noviny*,* Fučík had ample opportunities of distinguishing himself, not only by his alert and intelligent mind, but also by his uncompromising and dauntless temperament, as a result of which he was constantly serving gaol sentences. He paid two illicit visits to the Soviet Union, the first one for a short period in 1930, the second one in the years 1934-36, when he travelled widely in Central Asia. After the German occupation he remained at home, issuing illicit newspapers, and as a leading member of the Communist underground movement he was arrested in April 1942 and executed 18 months later.

The articles which he wrote in the notorious Prague prison of Pankrác and smuggled out piecemeal with the help of a Czech warder are the last of the brilliant descriptive pieces of reporting of which, during his lifetime, he wrote several dozen.

It forms a period document which is unusual, for one thing, on account of the circumstances under which it originated. The facts narrated in it are reproduced in a vivid and graphic manner. Some of the passages, particularly those which portray the men, whether small-fry or others, whom he encountered in gaol, plainly show that Fučík the journalist was developing into a remarkable stylist who, except in the fragment of a novel started on the day after Czechoslovakia was occupied, had no chance of fully developing his literary abilities. His

* *Czech left newspapers*

literary powers are convincingly displayed too in a critical study of some length, dealing firstly with Božena Němcová, the woman novelist of the Revival period, secondly with Karel Sabina, the revolutionary of 1848 who wrote the libretto of *The Bartered Bride*, and who later became a traitor to the national cause; and finally with Julius Zeyer, a belated romantic poet who flourished at the end of the 19th century.

What moves me so deeply in this book of Fučík's is neither the sensational character of the subject matter, nor the literary form. It is the spirit which is wafted from it. In it is the whole personality of Fučík, his serene, guileless, and self-reliant personality. Every word in it is unmistakably his, every turn of phrase is so familiar to me that on reading it I can hear the modulation of his voice to the very life. It is this spontaneity and authenticity of the book which to me is its most remarkable feature. Let the reader make no mistake, Fučík in no way dramatises himself, nor does he indulge in heroics: there is no artificial pose about him. In his book, from beginning to end, he is himself as he actually was. He is there with all his manly, robust and cheerful nature.

That is how I knew him from the middle of the 1920's onwards, and that is how he strikes me in his last book. I will endeavour to explain what Fučík's personality signified to me, and to many of my contemporaries who did not share the convictions which he so fiercely held. He exercised an immediate charm by reason of his human simplicity, his frankness, his sense of companionship. He impressed by his wide knowledge and critical outlook, he caused provocation by his firm attitude, he invariably convinced by his obvious sincerity. He combined the

acumen of a Christopher Caudwell* and the militant proclivities of a Gabriel Péri.** With both he had in common, not only the convictions, but also the moral sincerity and the unblenching heroism which does not fear death. Such was Julius Fučík in my memories of him, and such is the guise in which he presents himself to me in his last book.

English readers will do well, when they reflect upon this book, to compare this sturdily optimistic confession of faith by a man under torture with, say, the bawdy imagination of a writer like George Orwell in the book which marks his final decay, *1984*. Let them place side by side the vital fortitude of a man like Julius Fučík and the woebegone undergraduate mentality of so many English writers of the generation of the 1930's, who today so ostentatiously renounce his faith, which in reality was always beyond the reach of those eternal adolescents. Readers should, too, contrast Fučík's concluding words in this book with the schoolboyish and self-opinionated profundity of Cyril Connolly when he says, "From now on an artist will be judged only by the resonance of his solitude or the quality of his despair."

There is one other lesson which English readers can derive from this book. It is a lesson of a political

---

* *British writer killed in the Spanish Civil War while fighting with the International Brigades*

** *hero of the French anti-fascist movement, executed by the German fascists in 1941*

character connected with national psychology, a lesson which will spare them much disappointment in the future. Hitherto, it would seem, their idea of a Czech intellectual was based upon their acquaintance with a few types who were not really very typical of the Czech character. A high-minded professor of Puritan leanings; a wily, although not altogether successful statesman; an affable diplomatic *flâneur* with good social manners; a sceptical humanist of generally recognised brilliant literary attainments. In each of them English readers found something approximating to their own conception; they were attracted by their bourgeois idealism, their ubiquitous Europeanism, their lack of class-affiliation, or what might be better termed their social arrivism, and not the least important of their tendencies, their excessively sentimental pro-English attitude. Yet not one of them was so closely bound up with the roots of the Czech character, which derives from the people, as Julius Fučík. By becoming familiar with so typical an example of the Czech character as Fučík, English readers will better understand what has really happened to my country during the last thirty years.

Alois Skoumal
(1951)

NOTE BY GUSTA FUČÍKOVÁ

At Ravensbrück concentration camp I learnt from fellow-prisoners that my husband, Julius Fučík, editor of *Rudé Právo* and *Tvorba*, had been condemned to death by a Nazi court in Berlin on August 25 1943.

Questions as to his further destiny returned like echoes from the high walls around the camp.

After the defeat of Hitler Germany in May 1945, prisoners whom the Fascists had not yet tortured to death or killed were liberated from Nazi prisons and concentration camps. I was among those liberated.

I returned to my free country and began searching for my husband. I was like thousands and thousands of others who were and are looking for their husbands, wives, children, fathers, mothers, whom the German occupants had dragged off somewhere to their countless places of torture.

I learnt that Julius Fučík had been executed in Berlin on September 8 1943, fourteen days after he had been sentenced to death.

I also learnt that while he had been in Pankrác Prison Julius Fučík had written. This had been made possible by a warder, Adolf Kolínský, who had brought pencil and paper to my husband's cell and secretly taken the written pages one by one out of the prison.

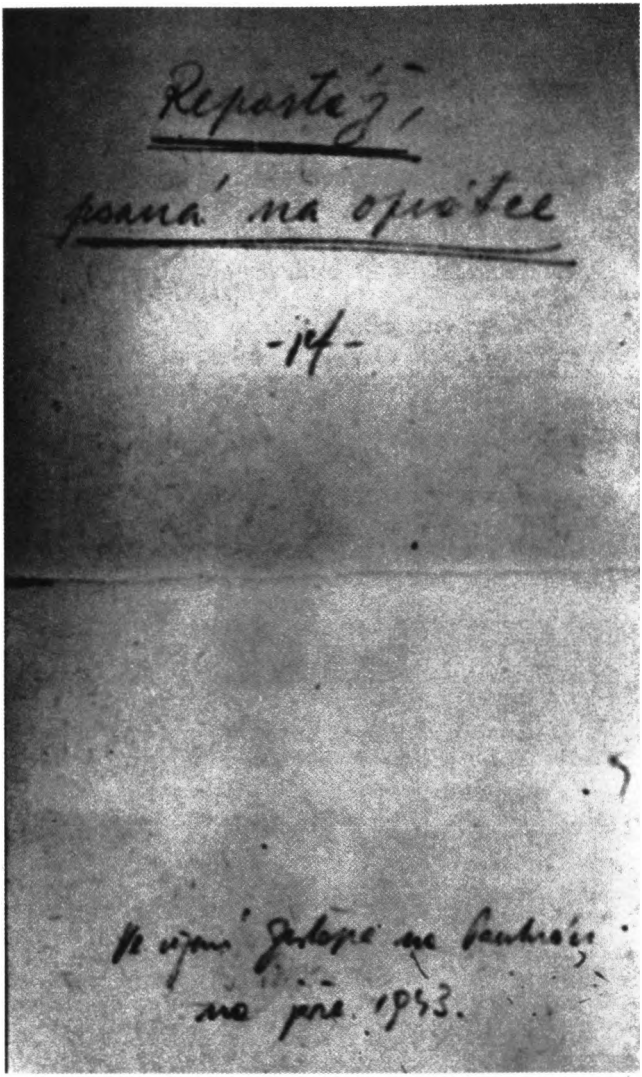
I arranged a meeting with this warder. Step by step I collected the material written by Julius Fučík in his

Pankrác prison. I then arranged these numbered pages, which had been hidden in various places with various people, and I now present them. This is the last work of Julius Fučík.

Prague, September 1945.

GUSTA FUČÍKOVÁ

Unveiling of a monument to Fučík in Berlin in 1975.



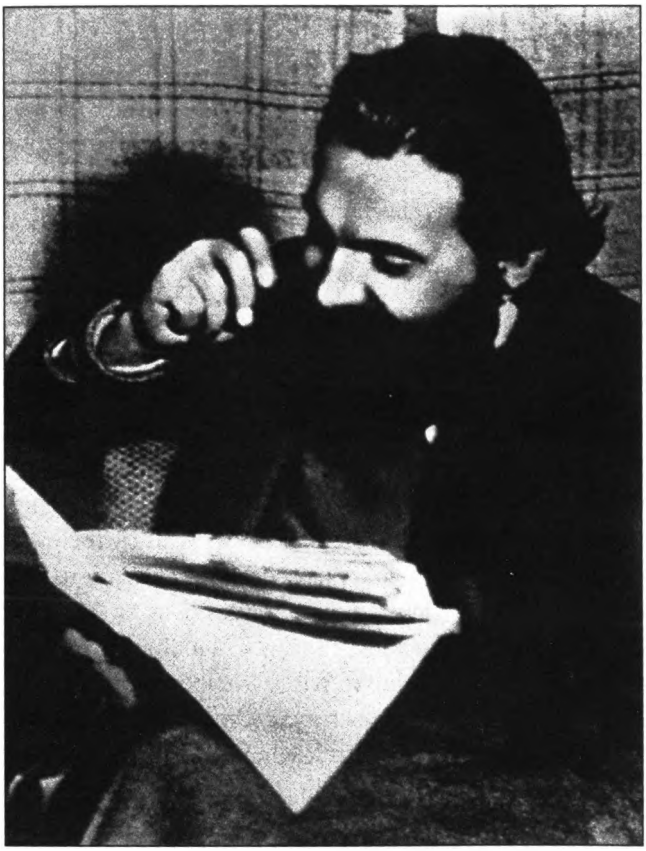
The title page of Fučík's manuscript.

WRITTEN IN THE GESTAPO PRISON AT PANKRÁC IN SPRING 1943

To sit to attention, with the body stiffly erect, with the hands pressed close to the knees, and the eyes, well-nigh dazzled, staring at the yellowish wall of the "house prison" in Petschek Palace - that is certainly not the most convenient position for thinking. Who can induce a thought to sit to attention?

Somebody–we shall probably never find out when and who–once called the "house prison" in Petschek Palace "the cinema." A flash of genius. A spacious room, with six long benches one behind the other, occupied by the rigid bodies of the prisoners to be interrogated, and a bare wall in front of them like a screen in a cinema. All the world's film studios have not turned out as many films as have been projected on to this wall by the eyes of prisoners waiting for a new cross-examination, for torture or death–films depicting entire lives or the most detailed scenes from a life, films about mothers, women, children, a destroyed home, a lost livelihood, films about a fearless comrade or a betrayal, about the man I gave that leaflet to, about blood flowing once again, about a firm handclasp laying a pledge upon me, films full of horror and determination, hatred and love, anxiety and hope. With his back turned towards life, everybody here dies daily in front of his own eyes. But not everybody is born again.

I have seen my own film here hundreds of times, gone through its details thousands of times. Now for once I shall try to tell its story. If the noose round my neck is tightened before I finish, there are millions I leave behind who will write its "happy ending."



Fučík as the full-bearded "Professor Horák" during the period of illegality.

I

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS

In five minutes' time the clock will strike ten. It is a beautiful, balmy spring evening, April 24 1942.

I am hurrying–in so far as my assumed guise of an elderly gentleman with a limp allows me–I am hurrying to get to the Jelineks' before they lock up the house. ***Klecan***,* my "adjutant," is awaiting me there. I know that he has nothing important to tell me this time nor have I anything to say to him but not to turn up when a meeting's been arranged would mean panic–and I particularly don't want to cause any unnecessary worry to those two good souls, our hosts.

They welcome me with a cup of tea. ***Klecan*** is already there waiting–and the Frieds as well. That's thoughtless of you. Comrades, I like to see you, but not all together like this. That's the surest road to prison and death. Either you stick to the rules of conspiracy or you stop working, because like this you're endangering both yourselves and others. Understand?

"Yes, we understand."

"And what have you got for me?"

"The May Day number of *Rudé Právo*."

"Fine. And you, Mirek?"

"Nothing special. There's nothing to report. Work's going well..."

---

* *Publisher's Note: Text printed in bold italics was omitted from previous English-language editions.*

"Good. We'll meet again after May Day. I'll be letting you know. So long then!"

"Just one more cup of tea, come on!"

"No thanks, Mrs. Jelínková, there are too many of us here."

"Oh but just one cup, please."

Steam is rising from the freshly-made tea.

Somebody rings the bell.

At this time of night? Who can it be?

The visitors are not patient. Blows rain down on the door.

"Open up there! Police!"

To the windows quick! Run!

I've got a pistol, I'll stay and cover you.

Too late! The Gestapo are under the windows, aiming their pistols into the room. Plain-clothes policemen stream in from the passage through the battered door to the kitchen and on to the rooms. One, two, three, nine men. They can't see me as I'm just behind their backs, behind the open door. I could shoot unhindered. But nine pistols are aimed at two women and three unarmed men. If I fire, they'll be the first to fall. Even if I only want to kill myself, bullets will begin flying and they'll be the victims. If I don't fire, they'll sit for perhaps half a year, perhaps a year, and the revolution will liberate them alive. Only ***Klecan*** and I can't get out of this, they'll torture us– they won't get anything out of me, and ***Klecan***? A fellow who fought in Spain, a fellow who went through two years in a concentration camp in France and came illegally from France to Prague in the middle of the war–no, he won't let out anything. I've got two seconds to think it out. Or is it perhaps three seconds?

If I shoot, I won't save anything. I'll only save myself torture, but four comrades will lose their lives for nothing. Is that it? Yes!

Right!

I emerge from my hiding-place.

"Ha! One more!"

First blow in the face. Perhaps it was meant to knock me out.

"Hände auf!"

Second. Third.

This is how I imagined it.

A house beautifully looked after has become a heap of overturned furniture and broken glass.

More blows and kicks.

"Marsch!"

They bundle me into a car, their pistols pointed at me all the time. The interrogation begins *en route*.

"Who are you?"

"Professor Horák."

"Liar!"

I shrug my shoulders.

"Sit still, or I shoot!"

"Shoot!"

Instead of shooting me, they merely punch me.

We are passing a tram. It seems to be festooned in white. A bridal tram, at this time of night? I must be getting feverish.

Petschek Palace. I thought I'd never enter it alive. And now I'm going up to the fourth floor at the double. Aha, the famous II-A 1, the anti-Communist department. Seems to me I'm even curious what's going to happen.

A tall, thin commissar, the head of the assault section, thrusts a pistol into his pocket and takes me off to his office. He lights me a cigarette.

"Who are you?"

"Professor Horák."

"Liar!"

The watch on his wrist says eleven o'clock.

"Search him!"

The search begins. They undress me.

"He's got an identity card."

"In what name?"

"Professor Horák."

"Check it up!"

Telephone.

"Of course, not registered. It's forged, that identity card."

"Who gave it to you?"

"Police headquarters."

First blow with a stick. Second. Third. Must I count them? You won't ever report these figures anywhere, my lad.

"Your name? Talk! Address? Talk! Who are your contacts? Talk! Which flats did you use? Talk! Talk! Talk! Or we'll beat the life out of you!"

How many blows can a healthy man stand?

The wireless booms midnight. The cafés are shutting, the last guests are returning to their homes,

lovers are dawdling in front of the house doors, unable to leave each other. The tall, thin commissar enters the room with a jocund smile:

"Everything in order–Mr. Editor?"

Who told them? The Jelineks? The Frieds? They don't even know my name.

"You see, we know everything. Talk! Be sensible."

A peculiar vocabulary! To be sensible = to betray.

I am not sensible.

"Tie him up! And give it to him hard!"

One o'clock. The last trams are returning to the depots, the streets are almost empty, the wireless is wishing its faithful listeners good-night.

"Who else is a member of the Central Committee?* Where are the transmitters? Where are the printing presses? Talk! Talk! Talk!"

Now I can count the blows more easily. The only pain I can feel is in my lips which are raw from being bitten.

"Off with his shoes!"

True enough, the soles of my feet aren't numb yet. I can feel that. Five, six, seven, and now it's as if the stick were going right through to my brain.

Two o'clock. Prague is asleep. Perhaps somewhere a child is beginning to fret in its sleep and a man is caressing his wife on the thigh.

---

* *the Central Committee of the Communist Party*

"Talk! Talk!"

I move my tongue round in my mouth and try to count how many teeth have been knocked out. I can't count them all. Twelve, fifteen, seventeen? No, that's how many commissars there are here now, "interrogating" me. Some of them are evidently tired already. And death still won't come.

Three o'clock. The dawn is creeping in from the edge of the city, the vegetable-sellers are on their way to the markets, the sweepers are going out on to the streets. Perhaps I shall still live to see one more morning.

They're bringing in my wife.

"Do you know him?"

I swallow blood that she shan't see ... though it's pretty useless, I admit–blood's flowing from every inch of my face, even from the tips of my fingers.

"Do you know him?"

"No!"

She said that, and not even by a look did she betray her horror. The darling! She kept her word never to admit she knew me, even though now it was already useless. Who could have told them my name?

They have taken her away. I have said goodbye to her with the most cheerful look I could manage. Perhaps it wasn't even cheerful. I don't know.

Four o'clock. Is it light already? Is it still dark? The blacked-out windows give no answer. And death still won't come. Am I to go to meet you? How?

I've bumped into somebody and fallen to the ground. They're kicking me, stamping on me. Yes,

that's the way, now it'll soon be the end. The dark commissar lifts me up by the beard and with a laugh of satisfaction shows me his fist full of torn-out hair. It's genuinely funny. And I no longer feel any pain.

Five o'clock, six, seven, ten, midday, the workers are going to work and leaving work, the children are going to school and leaving school, in the shops they're selling, at home they're cooking, perhaps in this very moment Mother is thinking of me, perhaps the comrades already know I've been arrested and are taking safety measures ... what if I were to talk ... no, don't worry, I won't, believe me. And in any case the end can't be far off now. By now it's all only a dream, an evil, feverish dream, blows are falling and then water is thrown at me and once again blows and once again "Talk! Talk! Talk!" and I still can't die. Mother, Father, why did you make me so strong?

Afternoon. Five o'clock. By now they're all tired. The blows now are only falling intermittently, at long intervals; by now it's merely a matter of routine. And all at once, out of the distance, out of the infinite distance, comes a soft, quiet voice, kindly like a caress:

"Er hat schon genug!"

And then I'm sitting down and the table in front of me is collapsing and again appearing and somebody is giving me something to drink and somebody is offering me a cigarette which I can't hold, and somebody is trying to put my shoes on and saying they won't go, and then they're half leading me and half carrying me down the stairs, to a car, we're driving along, somebody is aiming a pistol at me

again, I could laugh at it all, we're passing a tram festooned in white flowers, a bridal tram, but perhaps it's all only a dream, perhaps it's all only a fever or dying or at last death itself. Yet dying is difficult, but this isn't difficult, this isn't anything at all, this is mere child's play, gossamer, another breath and all will be over.

All over? Not yet, still not yet. Here I am standing once again, yes, really, I'm standing, alone, without help from anybody, and immediately in front of me is a dirty yellow wall, bespattered with–with what? Looks like blood... yes, it is, blood. I raise my finger and try to rub it a bit... it works, it's fresh, it's my...

Then somebody bangs me on the head from behind and orders me to raise my hands and do some drill: with the third movement I fall...

A tall SS-man is standing over me and kicking me to make me get up. How useless it is! Once again somebody is washing me, once again I'm sitting, a woman is handing me medicine and asking me where it hurts, and now it seems as if all my pain is in my heart.

In September 1938 Fučík was a soldier, and he took part in the mobilisation to defend Czechoslovakia against German fascism.

"You've got no heart," says the tall SS-man.

"Oh yes, I have!" I say, and all at once I'm proud that I still have enough strength to stand up for my heart.

And then everything fades out again, the wall and the woman with the medicine and the tall SS-man...

In front of me is the open door of the cell. A fat SS-man is dragging me inside, taking off the rags of my shirt, laying me on a palliasse, feeling my swollen body and ordering fomentations for me.

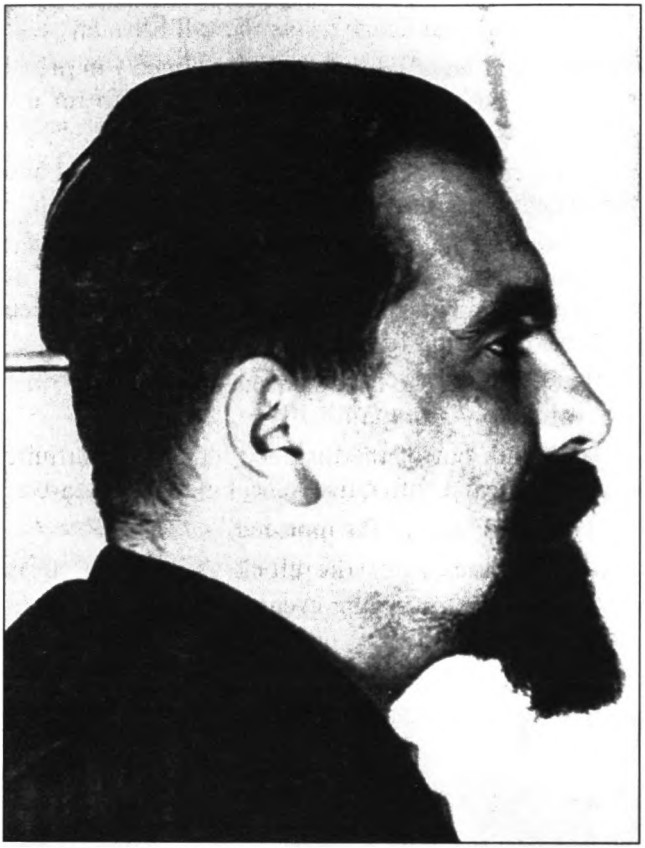
"Look," he says to the other, shaking his head, "just look what they're capable of!"

And again out of the distance, out of the infinite distance, I hear a soft, quiet voice, kindly like a caress:

"He won't last till the morning."

Five minutes later the clock strikes ten. It is a beautiful, balmy spring evening, April 25 1942.

On a reporting mission to the USSR, Fučík became an honorary member of the Kirghiz National Division.



The last photograph of Fučík, taken by the Gestapo after his arrest.

II

DYING

"When to the stars we close our eyes

And see no more the glare of the sun ..."

Two men, their hands folded low in front of them, walk round a white crypt one behind the other with heavy, slow steps, singing a sad church hymn with dragging, discordant voices.

"...How sweet for our souls to be borne to the skies

Our journey done, our journey done..."

Somebody has died. Who? I try to turn my head. Perhaps I shall catch a glimpse of the coffin with the deceased person and the two candles pointing upwards at the head.

"...Where no more exists the darkness of night,

where ever shines the eternal light..."

I have succeeded in raising my eyes. I can't see anybody else. There's nobody here–only those two and myself. Who are they singing their dirge to?

"...And the star eternally sheds forth light,

Jesus Himself, God's only Son."

It's a funeral. Yes, it's quite definitely a funeral. And who's being buried? Who's there? Only those two–and myself. And myself! Can it perhaps be my funeral? But listen, my friends, this is a misunderstanding! I'm not dead at all. I'm very much alive. You can see for yourselves that I'm

looking at you and talking to you. Stop this! Don't you go burying me!

"*When the sad and last farewell is given*

By the dearly loved departed one... "

They don't hear me. Are they deaf? Aren't I speaking loud enough? Or am I perhaps really dead and they can't hear a voice without a body? And my body's lying there on its belly and I'm looking at my own funeral? Funny.

"...*Then burning looks are turned to heaven*

His journey done, his journey done... "

Now I remember. Somebody lifted me up with difficulty and clothed me, then they carried me on a stretcher, metallic steps rang out in the corridor and then ... And that was all. I don't know anything more. I can't remember anything more.

"... *Where ever shines the eternal light ...* "

But all this doesn't make sense. I'm alive. I can feel a certain distant pain and I'm thirsty. Dead men aren't thirsty. I summon all my strength in an attempt to move my hand, and a sort of strange, unnatural voice breaks forth from me:

"Drink!"

At last. The two men have stopped walking round in circles. And now they're bending over me and one of them is raising my head and holding a jug of water to my mouth.

"Look here, you've got to eat something as well. For the last two days you've been doing nothing but drink and drink..."

What's he telling me? The last two days? What day is it today?

"Monday."

Monday. And I was arrested on Friday. How heavy my head is! And how cooling the water is. Sleep! Let me sleep! A drop has rippled the glassy surface of the well. That's the spring in the meadow, in the mountains. I know it, near the forester's cottage under Roklan, and fine, steady rain is rustling in the pinewoods... how sweet it is to sleep...

... And when I awake once again, it's Tuesday evening and a dog is standing over me. An Alsatian. He looks at me inquisitively with his beautiful, wise eyes and asks me:

"Where did you live?"

Oh no, that's not the dog. That's somebody else's voice. Yes, there's somebody else standing there, I can see his big boots, and another pair of big boots and military trousers, but I can't see any higher, my head goes round and round when I try to look, oh, what does it matter, let me sleep...

Wednesday.

The two men who were singing psalms are now sitting at the table eating out of earthenware dishes. Now I can make them out properly. One is a youngish fellow and the other is older, and they don't seem to look like monks. And the crypt isn't a crypt any longer, it's a prison cell like any other, the floorboards run off convergingly from my eyes and at the end of them is a heavy, dark door...

A key rattles in the lock, the two men jump up and stand to attention, two others in SS-uniforms enter and order them to dress me–I had no idea what pain was hidden away in each trouser leg, in each sleeve–they put me on a stretcher and carry me down the stairs, the metallic steps ring out along the long

corridor... so this is the way they brought me once before when I finished up by losing consciousness. Where does it lead to? What hell will it end in?

The gloomy, unwelcoming reception office of the Pankrác *Polizei-Gefängnis*. They place me on the ground and a Czech voice with assumed good-heartedness translates a question spat out in fury by a German voice:

"Do you know her?"

I support my chin on my hand. A young girl with a broad face stands in front of the stretcher. She stands proudly, absolutely erect, her head held high, not defiantly, but sublimely, with only her eyes slightly lowered, just enough to see me and be able to greet me with them.

"No."

I remember having seen her once perhaps for a moment on that wild night in Petschek Palace. And now for the second time. Alas, there was never a third time when I could have pressed her hand for the sublime way she stood there. She was the wife of Arnošt Lorenz.* And she was executed in the first few days after martial law was declared in 1942.

"But you're sure to know who this is."

Anička Jiráskova! Good heavens, Anička, how did you get here? I've never uttered your name, you've had nothing to do with me, I don't know you, you understand, I don't know you.

---

* *organiser of an illegal print-shop*

"No, I don't."

"Come on, man, be sensible!"

"I don't know her."

"Julius, it's useless," says Anička, and only an almost imperceptible movement of her fingers clutching her handkerchief betrays her excitement, "it's useless. They know everything."

"Who told them?"

"Shut up!" - somebody cuts short her reply and pushes her violently away when she bends down to give me her hand.

Anička!

I can't hear any more questions. And from the distance, painlessly, as though I were only a spectator, I feel two SS-men taking me back to the cell, brutally tossing me about on the stretcher and asking with a laugh if I wouldn't rather swing by the neck.

Thursday.

I am beginning to take things in. One of my fellow-prisoners, the younger one, is called Karlík, the other one, the elder one, goes by the name of "Dad". They are telling me something about themselves, but everything gets muddled up in my head, there's something about a mine and children sitting on benches, I hear a bell, there must be a fire somewhere, apparently a doctor and an SS-medical orderly come to see me every day, apparently I'm not in such a bad way and I shall get fit again all right. That's what "Dad" says, and he says it so pressingly and Karlík is so fervent in his assent that even in the state I'm in I can still feel they're telling a white lie. Good fellows! I'm sorry I can't believe them.

Afternoon.

The cell door is opened and a dog runs in, noiselessly, lightly. He stops near my head and once again looks at me inquisitively. And once again there are two pairs of big boots–now I know: one of them belongs to the owner of the dog, the superintendent of Pankrác prison, the other to the chief of the anti-Communist department of the Gestapo who presided over my interrogation that night and then a pair of civilian trousers. My eye follows them upwards–yes, I know, that's the tall, thin commissar who was in charge of the assault section. He sits down in a chair and begins to cross-question me.

"Your game's up, at least save yourself. Speak!"

He offers me a cigarette. I refuse it. I wouldn't be able to hold it.

"How long did you live at the Baxes'?"

At the Baxes'! That too! Who told them?

"You see, we know everything. Talk!"

If you know everything, what's the point of my speaking any more? I haven't lived my life in vain–and I'm not going to spoil the end.

The interrogation lasts for an hour. He doesn't shout but patiently repeats his questions, and when he gets no answer, puts a second, third, tenth.

"Can't you realise? It's the end, you understand, you've lost everything."

"I'm the only one who's lost."

"Do you still believe in a Communist victory?"

"Of course."

"He still believes," asks the chief in German, and the tall commissar translates, "he still believes in Russia's victory?"

"Of course. It can't end any other way."

By this time I am tired. I had gathered together all my strength so as to be on my guard, now my consciousness is flowing quickly away from me like blood from a deep wound. I can still feel how they are giving me their hands–perhaps they read the sign of death on my forehead. It's true, in some countries it used even to be the custom for the hangman to kiss the condemned person before carrying out the sentence.

Evening.

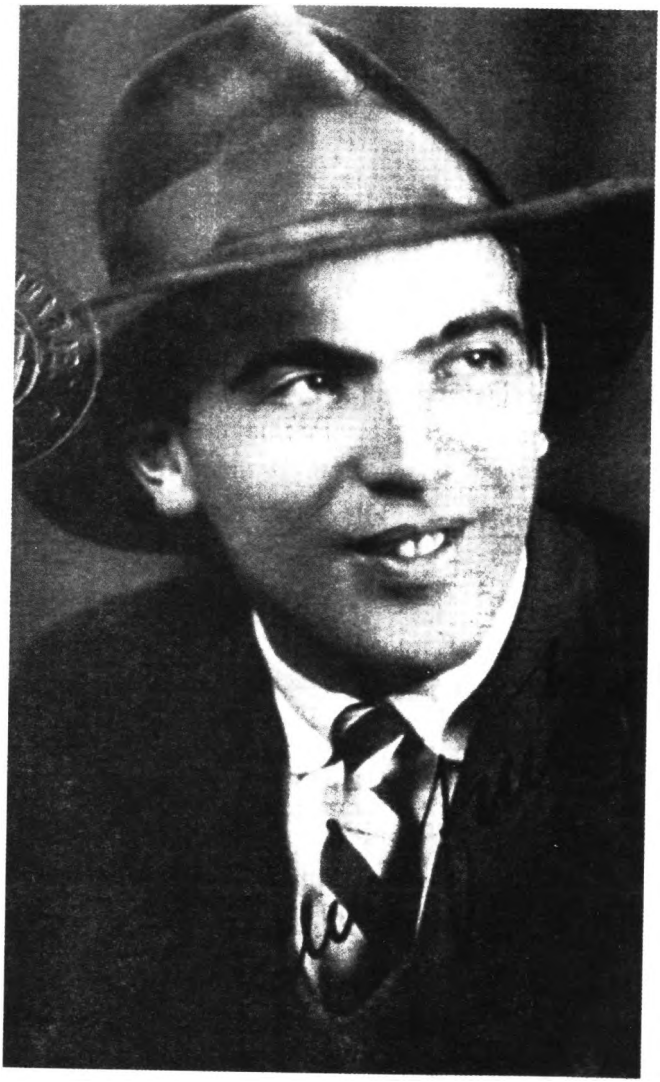
Two men with folded hands walk in a circle one behind the other, singing a sad hymn with dragging, discordant voices:

"When to the stars we close our eyes

And see no more ..."

Oh, people, friends, stop this! It may be a nice hymn, but today, today is the eve of May Day, the most beautiful, the most joyous festival of man. I attempt to sing something cheerful, but perhaps it sounds still sadder because Karlík turns away and Dad wipes his eyes. Still I won't give in, I go on singing and they gradually join in. I fall asleep contentedly.

Early morning on May Day.



Fučík in 1930.

The clock on the prison tower strikes three. Now I hear it clearly for the first time. Now I am fully conscious for the first time since my arrest. I feel the fresh air flowing down through the open window and easing my palliasse on the floor, I feel bits of straw suddenly pressing against my chest and belly, every inch of my body aches with a thousand aches and I have difficulty in breathing. Suddenly, as though you had opened a window, I see clearly: this is the end. I am dying.

It's been a long time, death, before you came. And yet I'd still hoped not to meet you till many years later, still hoped to live the life of a free man again, to be able to work a lot again, love a lot, sing a lot, and tramp around the world. In fact I've only just now matured and I still had plenty, plenty of strength. But now I haven't. It's waning to an end.

I have loved life, and for the beauty of it I went on to the battlefield. I have loved you, people, and I was glad when you returned my love, and I suffered when you failed to understand me. If I have hurt anyone, forgive me; if I have brought joy to anyone, forget it! May sadness never belong to my name. This is my last will for you, Father and Mother, and my sisters, for you, my Gustina, for you, Comrades, for all whom I have held dear. If you think that tears can wash away the fine dust of grief, then cry awhile. But don't be sorry about it. I have lived for joy, I am dying for joy and you would be wronging me if you were to place the angel of sorrow on my grave.

May Day! This was the hour at which we used to get up on the edge of the city and prepare our banners. This was the hour when the first columns began to

form on the streets of Moscow for the May Day parade. And now at this hour millions of people are fighting the last battle for the freedom of man and thousands are falling in this struggle. I am one of them. And to be one of them, to be one of the fighters in this last battle, that is wonderful.

But dying is not wonderful. I am suffocating. I can't breathe. I hear the rattle in my throat, I can still wake my fellow-prisoners. Perhaps if I were to moisten it with a little water... But the water in the jug's all finished. There, only six paces away from me, in the lavatory in the corner of the cell, is enough water. But shall I still have enough strength to get to it?

I drag myself along on my belly, quietly, very quietly, as though all the glory of death lay in not waking anybody. I have dragged myself all the way and am gulping down the water from the bottom of the lavatory.

I don't know how long it lasted. I don't know how long I took crawling back. My consciousness is leaving me again. I feel for the artery on my arm. I am completely numb. My heart has gone high up into my throat and now it is violently falling downwards. I am falling with it. I am falling a long way. As I go, I can still hear Karlik's voice:

"Dad, Dad, do you hear? Poor chap, this is the end."

* * * *

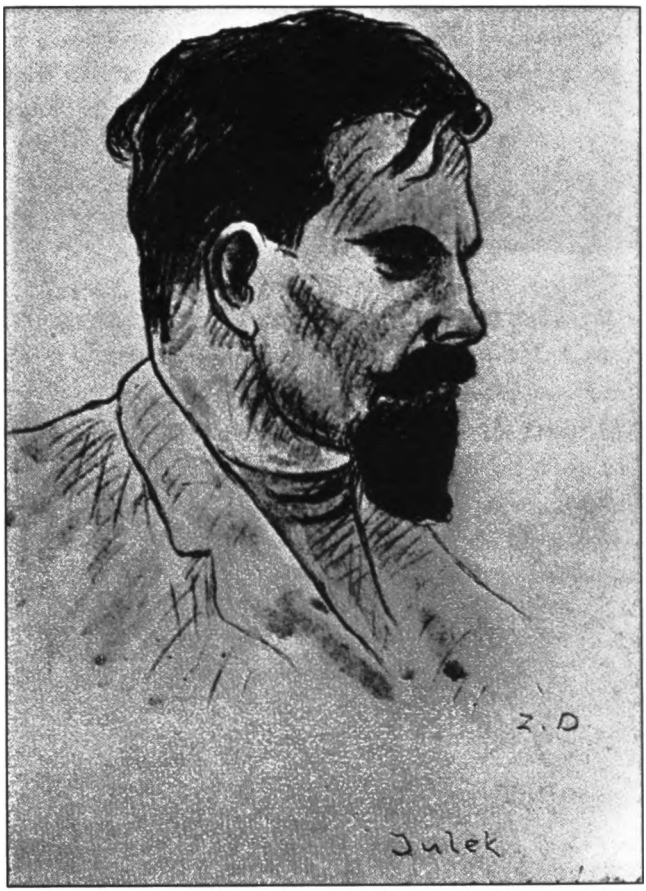
In the morning the doctor came.

But I only got to know all this much later.

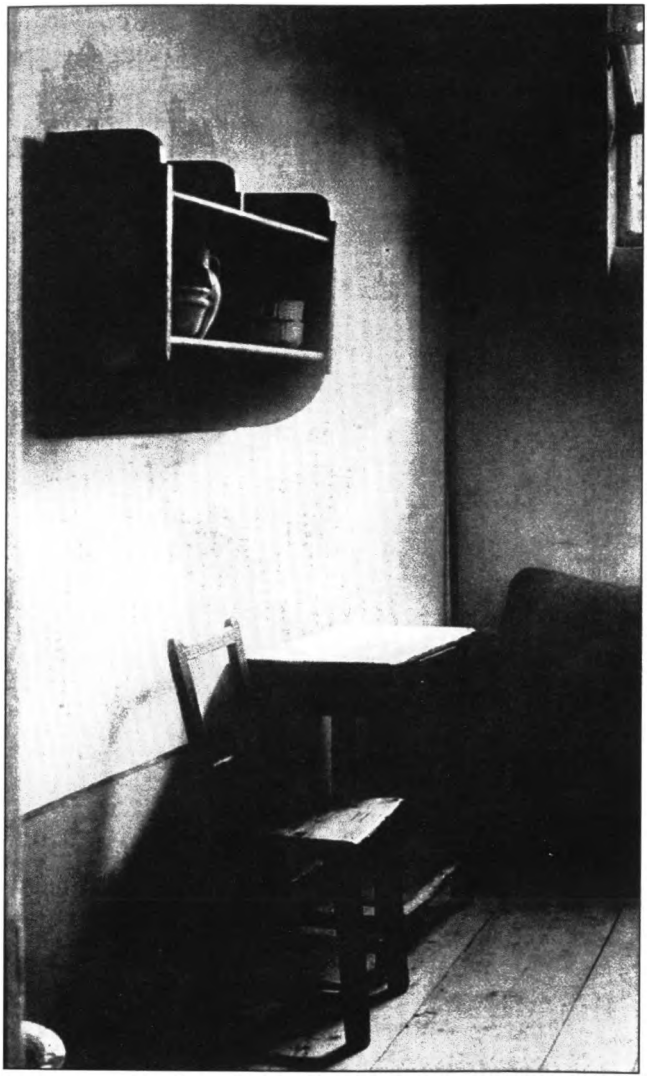
He came, examined me and shook his head. Then he returned to the medical inspection room, tore up

the death certificate he had filled up with my name the day before, and pronounced his judgment as a specialist:

"The constitution of a horse!"



A portrait of Fučík secretly drawn in the autumn of 1942 by the Czech artist Zdeněk Dvořák, who was tortured to death in Auschwitz.



Cell 267 in Pankrác Prison, where Fučik wrote Report from the Gallows.

III

CELL 267

Seven steps from the door to the window, seven steps from the window to the door.

That I know.

How often have I paced this distance over the deal floorboards of this Pankrác cell! And perhaps it was in this very cell that I sat once before because ***I had defended too strongly the right of the Sudeten Germans to self-determination and seen*** too clearly what results the disastrous policy of the Czech bourgeoisie would have for the Czech nation. Now they are crucifying my nation, ***guards from the Sudetenland*** are patrolling before the cell door and somewhere outside blind political fates are once again spinning ***revenge and national hatred***. How many centuries will man need before he opens his eyes? In how many thousands of cells has humanity had to tread the way forward? And how many more are there still to come? Oh Christ-child of Neruda,* man on his journey to the light is far from the end of his fight. But: sleep no longer, sleep no longer!

Seven steps there, seven steps back. Against one wall a folding bed, against the other a shelf of a dismal brown colour with earthenware vessels. Yes, I know it. Only now it's been a bit mechanised, there's central

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* *Jan Neruda, 19th century Czech poet and journalist*

heating, the bucket's been replaced by a water-closet–and above all the people, above all the people have been mechanised. Like an automaton. Press a button, that is, rattle the key in the cell door or open the spy-hole–and the prisoners jump up, whatever they are doing, and stand to attention one behind the other; open the door, and the head of the cell yells out all in one breath:

"Achtung! Zellezwosiebenundsechsigbelegtmit-dreimannallesinordnung."

So then: 267. That's our cell. But in this cell the automaton doesn't function with absolute precision: Only two men jump up. I meanwhile lie on my palliasse under the window, I lie on my belly, a week, a fortnight, a month, six weeks–and I am born again: I can already move my head, I can already lift my hand, I can already raise myself on to my elbows, I have even attempted to turn over on to my back... Decidedly, it's quicker writing this than living it.

The cell, too, is undergoing changes. In place of a three they've put up a two on the door of the cell, now there are only two of us here. Karlík, the younger of the two men who buried me with their mournful singing, has disappeared, and only the memory of a good heart has remained behind him. I see him in fact only in a half-dream and only the last two days of his stay with us. He is patiently telling me his story again and again and I am once again dozing off in the middle of it all.

His name is Karel Malec, he's an engineman and used to work on the cage in an ore mine somewhere near Hudlice. From there he smuggled out explosives necessary for the struggle on the home front. He was

arrested nearly two years ago, now he is to go off for his trial, perhaps to Berlin, there's a whole crowd of them involved, who knows how it will end, he has a wife and two children, he loves them, very much– but after all, it was my duty, you know, I couldn't do anything else.

He sits by me a long time and forces me to eat. I cannot. On Saturday–is it already eight days since I came here?–he has recourse to a major effort: he tells the *Polizeimeister* that I haven't eaten a thing the whole time I've been here. The *Polizeimeister*, the eternally worried Pankrác medical orderly in SS-uniform, without whose knowledge the Czech doctor cannot prescribe even so much as an aspirin, personally brings a bowl of diet soup and stands over me until I've finished it. Karlík is very satisfied with his success and the next day he himself pours Sunday's bowl of soup into me.

But it will go no farther. With my jaws all bashed about I cannot crush even the pulpy potatoes in the Sunday goulash, and my contracted throat rebels against any morsel that's at all stringy.

"He won't even eat goulash, not even goulash!" wails Karlík and shakes his head over me sorrowfully.

And then he eagerly sets to on my portion, sharing it equally with "Dad".

Oh you who never lived through 1942 in Pankrác, you don't know, you can't know, what goulash is! Regularly, even in the worst times, when the stomach rumbled with hunger, when the skeletons in human flesh turned out for a bath, when at least with his eyes comrade robbed comrade of a bit of his ration, when even the revolting mash of dried vegetables,

diluted with watery tomato extract, seemed a highly desirable luxury, even in these worst moments, regularly twice a week–on Thursdays and Sundays–the *Hausarbeiters* would shake out a ladleful of potatoes into the dish and pour over it a spoonful of goulash sauce with a few shreds of meat. It was wonderfully tasty, yes, but it was more than tasty, it was a tangible reminder of human life, it was something civil, something normal in the cruel abnormality of a Gestapo prison, something which was talked about sweetly and with delight–oh who could imagine what high virtues can be acquired by a spoonful of good gravy, seasoned with the horror of permanent nearness to death.

Two months passed, and I was myself able to understand Karlík's astonishment. I wouldn't even eat goulash–nothing could convince him about my imminent death so clearly as this.

The following night, at two o'clock, they woke Karlík. He had five minutes in which to get ready for the transport, just as though he was to be gone only for a moment, as though he did not have ahead of him a journey perhaps to the very end of his life, to a new prison, to a concentration camp, to an execution site, who knows where. Once again he knelt down beside my palliasse, put his arms round my head and kissed me–a rasping cry came from the uniformed warder in the corridor to show that feelings have no business to exist in Pankrác–Karlík went out through the door, the lock clicked...

... and only two of us were left in the cell.

Shall we ever see each other again? And how soon will the next farewell take place? Which of the two of us left will go first? And whither? Who was it who

called him? A warder in SS-uniform? Or death, which has no uniform?

I am writing this now only in the reflected light of thoughts which have stayed with us since that first farewell. A whole year has elapsed since that time, and the thoughts which accompanied our departing comrade have often returned with greater or lesser urgency. The figure two hung up on the door of the cell has once again changed into a three and again into a two and again three, two, three, two, new fellow-prisoners have come and gone away again– only those two who remained that day in cell 267 still sit on in it loyally together:

"Dad" and I.

* * * *

"Dad"–is a sixty-year-old teacher named Josef Pešek, a doyen of teachers. He was arrested eighty-five days before I was, on the grounds of having intrigued against the *Reich* with his plans for a reform of the free Czech school.

"Dad"–is ...

But how are you going to write this, my lad? It'll be hard work: Two men, one cell and a year! In that time the inverted commas round the name "Dad" have disappeared, in that time two fellow-prisoners of different ages have become in very fact father and son, in that time we have mutually exchanged habits and favourite expressions and even the tone of our voices–try and recognise today what is mine and what is Dad's, what he came into the cell with and what I came in with!

He has watched over me night after night and scared death away with moist, white bandages whenever it

has approached. He has self-sacrificingly cleaned the pus from my wounds and never given any sign of being conscious of the smell of putrefaction issuing from my palliasse. He has washed and mended the rags of my shirt which was a victim of my first cross-examination, and when even this was beyond all hope, clothed me in his own underwear. He has brought me a daisy and a blade of grass which he risked picking during the morning half-hour in the courtyard of Pankrác prison. He has accompanied me with kindly eyes when I have gone off for further cross-examinations, and put new bandages on the new wounds with which I returned. When they took me off at night to interrogate me, he would not go to sleep till I had returned and he had laid me on my palliasse and carefully tucked me into my blankets.

Such were our beginnings, and living together has not altered them even when I became able to stand on my own legs and pay off my debts as a son.

But you'll never write everything at one breath like this, my lad. Cell 267 had a rich life in that year and everything it lived Dad lived too in his own way. That must be said. And the story's not at an end yet. (Which even sounds hopeful.)

* * * *

Cell 267 has a rich life. Almost every hour the door opens and there is an inspection. This is the prescribed strict supervision over a dangerous Communist criminal, but it is also straightforward curiosity. Often people die here who are not meant to die. But it rarely happens that a person whose death is expected by everybody does not die. The warders from other corridors come here as well, enter into conversation

or silently uncover the blankets, relish the wounds with the eye of an expert, and according to their characters make cynical remarks or adopt a more friendly tone. One of them–we have begun to call him "Nosey"–comes more often than the others and asks with a broad grin if the "red devil" needs anything. No, thank you, he doesn't need anything. A few days later "Nosey" discovers that the red devil does need something after all: a shave. So he brings along a barber.

This is the first prisoner I meet apart from those in our cell: Comrade Boček. "Nosey"'s good-hearted service proves to be a mixed blessing. Dad holds my head, Comrade Boček kneels near the palliasse and attempts to hack a way through the beechen undergrowth with a blunt safety-razor. His hands tremble and he has tears in his eyes. He is convinced that he is shaving a corpse. I try to calm him:

"Courage, brother! If I succeeded in sticking out the interrogation at Petschek Palace, I think I'll be able to stick your shaving all right."

But we're none too strong all the same and both of us have to take a rest, he and I.

Two days later I get to know two more prisoners. The commissars in Petschek Palace are impatient. They have sent for me, and because every day the *Polizeimeister* writes "*Transportunfähig*" on the summons paper, they send orders that I'm to be transported by any available means. So two prisoners in the convict uniform of orderlies, or *Hausarbeiters*, call at our cell with a stretcher, Dad with great difficulty gets me into my clothes, the comrades put

me on to the stretcher and carry me. One of them is Comrade Skořepa, the future solicitous father of the entire corridor, the other is .* He leans over me as I slip down the slanting surface of the stretcher on the way downstairs, and says:

"Stick it!"

Then he adds more quietly:

"Whatever happens!"

This time we do not call at the reception office. They carry me on, by the long passage-way to the exit, the corridor is packed with people–it is Thursday, and people are coming for the dirty linen of their imprisoned relatives–all of them look at this mournful procession, their eyes full of compassion, and that is not very reassuring for me. So I pass my hand up to my head and clench my fist. Perhaps they see it and realise that I am greeting them, perhaps it is only a foolish gesture, but I can't do anything more, I'm not yet strong enough.

In the Pankrác courtyard they load the stretcher on to a lorry, two SS-men sit with the driver, two SS-men with their hands on their loosened revolver holsters stand with their legs astride near my head–and off we go. No, it wasn't exactly an ideal road: one pothole, another pothole–and before we'd gone two hundred yards, I lost consciousness. It was a comic drive through the streets of Prague: a five-tonner meant for thirty prisoners consuming petrol for one prisoner, and two SS-men in the front and two in the back, glaring carnivorously, with revolvers in their hands, guarding a corpse, to prevent it escaping.

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* *Fučík left out the name.*

The next day the comedy was repeated. This time, however, I held out as far as Petschek Palace. The cross-examination did not take long. Commissar Friedrich touched my body somewhat inconsiderately, and once again they carried me back unconscious.

And now came days in which I could no longer doubt that I lived. Pain, the twin sister of life, reminded me of this very clearly. Pankrác, too, had learnt that by some oversight I was alive, and the first greetings began to arrive: greetings tapped on the thick walls or carried in the eyes of the orderlies when they distributed the food.

Only my wife knew nothing about me. Alone in her cell only one floor below and three or four cells farther on, she lived in anxiety and hope until one of her neighbours whispered to her during the morning half-hour that things were all over with me, that I had apparently succumbed to wounds received during a cross-examination. Then she roamed round the court and her world went spinning round and she did not feel how her wardress was giving her consolation in the form of blows in the face and trying to get her back into the line which is the symbol of regular prison life. What can her large good eyes have seen as they gazed, without tears, at the white walls of her cell? And the next day came another report: no, I had not been completely beaten to death, but I hadn't been able to bear the pain and had hanged myself in my cell.

And meanwhile I sprawled on my wretched palliasse and every evening and every morning I stubbornly turned on my side to sing to Gustina the songs she loved. How could she fail to hear them when I put so much feeling into them?

Today she knows, today she hears, although she is farther away than she was then. And today even the warders know and have become used to cell 267 singing, and they don't even rap on the doors and order us to be quiet.

Cell 267 sings. I have sung all my life, I don't see why I should stop just at the end when life is at its most intense. And Dad Pešek? Oh, he's an unusual case! He loves singing passionately. He has neither a musical ear nor a voice nor a memory for music, but he loves song with such magnificent, devoted love and finds in it so much joy that I do not even hear when he slips from one key to another and obstinately sings G when your ear has a downright longing for A. And so we sing when nostalgia steals in upon us, we sing when the day is cheerful, with song we accompany a departing comrade whom we shall perhaps never see again, with song we welcome good news from the eastern battlefields, we sing for consolation and we sing out of joy, in the same way as people have sung through the ages, and will sing, so long as they are people.

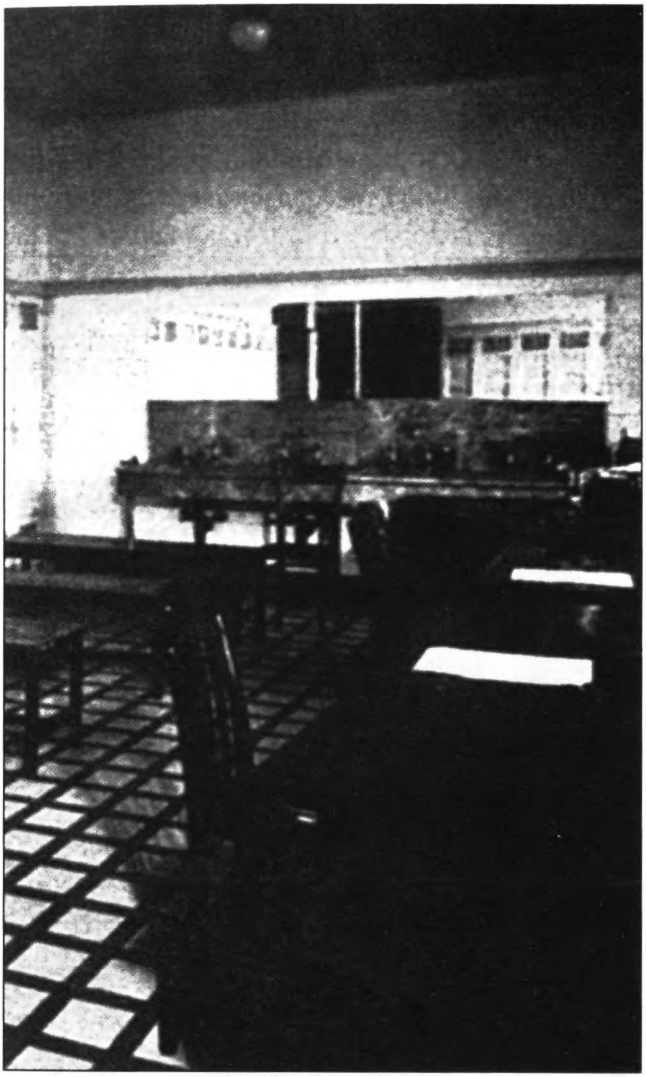
Without song there is no life as there is no life without the sun. And we are in double need of song because the sun does not reach us. No.267 faces north, only a few moments in the summer months does the setting sun outline the shadow of the window bars on the eastern wall–and then Dad leans up against the bedstead and looks at this fleeting sunny visitor... and that is the saddest look you can see here.

The sun! So generously shines the circular magician, so many wonders performs before human eyes. And so few people live in the sun. It will, yes, it will shine, and people will live in its rays. It is glorious

to know this. And yet you would so like to know something infinitely less important: will it shine–also for us?

Our cell faces north. Only sometimes in the summer, when it is a fine day, do we see the sun set. Oh, Dad, but I would so like once to see the sun rise!

"The cinema" in Petschek Palace, where Gestapo prisoners waited before interrogation.



"No.400"–another waiting room for Czech prisoners in Petschek Palace.

IV

ROOM FOUR HUNDRED

Resurrection from the dead is a somewhat peculiar affair. So peculiar as to baffle description. The world is attractive on a beautiful day when you've had a good sleep. But this is as though the day had been more beautiful and you had slept better than ever before. You think you know the stage of life well. But this is as though the technicians had switched all the lights on with clear glass and suddenly showed you the stage setting fully lit up. You think you've had a good look. But this is as though you had put a telescope to your eye and then added a microscope. Resurrection from the dead is an entirely spring event, and like the spring shows you unsuspected magic even in the most familiar surroundings.

And this is even the case when you know that it is only for a moment. It is even the case when your surroundings are as pleasant and opulent as a Pankrác cell.

One day, however, they even bring you back to the world. One day they call you for interrogation even without a stretcher–and although you think it's impossible, you manage somehow. The corridor has a railing, the staircase has banisters, you go in fact more on all fours than on your two legs, and down below your fellow-prisoners take you in charge and bring you right to the prison lorry. Then you sit, ten, twelve people in a dark travelling cell, new faces smile at you and you smile at them, somebody whispers

something to you and you don't know who it is, you press somebody's hand and you don't know whose it is–then the lorry suddenly lurches into the entrance to Petschek Palace, the comrades carry you, you enter into spacious rooms with bare walls, five benches one behind the other with people sitting to attention on them, their hands on their knees, looking motionlessly at the empty wall in front of them... and that, my lad. is a piece of your new world, called the cinema.

MAY DAY INTERMEZZO 1943

Today is May Day 1943. And the warder who's on duty is safe, so I can write. What luck! To be once again a Communist journalist for a while on this day, and write a report on a May Day parade of the fighting forces of the new world!

Don't expect to hear about streaming banners. There was nothing like that. I cannot even tell you about stirring deeds which are so good to listen to. Everything today was much simpler. Not the boisterous, explosive wave of tens of thousands which I have seen in other years streaming through the streets of Prague, ***not the iron march of the hundreds of thousands I heard rumble through Berlin's streets,*** not the glorious sea of millions which I have seen deluging the Red Square in Moscow. Here you can see neither millions nor hundreds. Here you see only a few comrades, men and women. And yet, you feel, it is not less. It is not, because this is a review of the strength which at this very moment is going through the fiercest fire, changing not into ashes but into steel. A review in the trenches during battle. And in the trenches field-grey is worn.

Everything is contained in little things like this. Who knows if you will understand this at all, you who will one day read this and who have never lived it. But try to understand it. Believe me, there is strength in it.

The morning greeting from the neighbouring cell which taps out two bars from Beethoven is today more festive, more emphatic and the wall interprets it with higher tones.

We put on the best we have. It is the same in all the cells.

We are already in full rig-out when breakfast comes. In front of the open cell door file the orderlies with bread, black coffee and water. Comrade Skořepa issues three small loaves of bread instead of two. That is his greeting for May Day: an active greeting from an attentive soul. And under the loaves finger presses finger. Speaking is forbidden, even your eyes are watched–but cannot dumb people speak distinctly enough with their fingers?

In the courtyard under the window of our cell the women are running out to the morning half-hour. I climb on to the table and look down through the iron bars. Perhaps they will catch sight of me. They have. And they're raising their fists in greeting. I return the greeting. Down below in the court today things are alive, absolutely different, more joyously alive than on other days. The wardress doesn't see anything, or even perhaps doesn't want to see anything. And that too belongs to this year's May Day parade.

Now comes our half-hour. I lead the exercises. It's the First of May, comrades, today we start differently,

even if the guards are surprised. First exercise, one, two, one, two, hammer blows. And second exercise: mowing. Hammer and scythe. With a spot of imagination the comrades will perhaps understand. Hammer and sickle. I look around. They smile and repeat the exercises with verve. They have understood. There, comrades, that's our May Day meeting, and this pantomime–that's our May Day promise that even if it means death we remain loyal.

Back in the cell. Nine o'clock. Now the clock on the Kremlin is striking ten and the parade on the Red Square is just beginning. Dad, we go with them! They're singing the *International* there now, at this moment the *International* is sounding forth all over the world, let it sound in our cell as well. We sing. And then one revolutionary song after another peals forth, for we don't want to be alone, we aren't alone, we belong to those who are now singing freely, in freedom, but equally much in the fight as we ...

Comrades in prisons,
In cold torture-chambers,
You with us, you with us,
Though you are not in our columns ...

Yes, we with you.*

That's how we in cell 267 planned the triumphant conclusion of our May Day parade, 1943. But is it really the end? What about that woman orderly from the women's department who is walking through the court this afternoon and whistling the Red Army March and the Partisans' Song and other Soviet songs to encourage the men in their cells? And what about that man in the uniform of a Czech policeman who brought me pencil and paper and who is now on guard

* *The words are in Russian in Fučík's manuscript.*

in the corridor to make sure no intruder catches me writing. And what about that other man ***in SS-uniform*** who really started me off on this writing, who takes these pages away and carefully hides them so that they can appear ***in the light*** at the right time? They'd pay with their heads for this piece of paper. They're risking their lives to be a bridge between today with its prison bars and tomorrow's freedom. They're fighting. They're fighting devotedly and fearlessly in their places, as the lie of the land dictates, and with all the means at their disposal. And they're absolutely unassuming and inconspicuous, and so completely without pathos, so that you wouldn't know anything of the life-and-death struggle in which they're on the side of their friends and in which they stand an equal chance of going under as of winning through.

Ten times, twenty times, you've seen the army of the revolution march by at May Day parades, and it was glorious. But it is only in the struggle that you appreciate the real strength of this army and how indestructible it is. Death is simpler than you had thought, and heroism has no halo. But the struggle is still more cruel than you had imagined, and to stick it out and carry it through to victory–that requires immeasurable strength. Every day you see it in motion, but not always are you fully conscious of it. Everything seems so much a matter of course.

Today you have once again been conscious of it.

At the May Day parade 1943.

* * * *

May Day 1943 has temporarily interrupted the flow of this narration. It is well so. On festival days one remembers things rather differently, and perhaps the

joy which dominates this day would distort my memories.

And the "cinema" in Petschek Palace is certainly nothing joyous. It is the ante-room to a torture-chamber from which you hear other comrades' groans and cries of horror, and you don't know what awaits you. You see people go out from here healthy, strong and full of life, and after two or three hours of questioning return mutilated and broken. You hear a loud voice reporting for interrogation–and an hour later a broken voice, stifled with pain and fever, reporting its owner's return. And something still worse: you see people going off with a serene, straight look, but unable to look you in the eye when they return. Somewhere up there in the interrogation room, there was maybe one single moment of weakness, one instant of indecision perhaps, one glimmer of fear or longing to preserve one's ego–and today or tomorrow new people will come here and live through all the horrors from the beginning, new people whom a comrade in the struggle has surrendered to the enemy.

The spectacle of people whose conscience is troubled is more terrible than the spectacle of people who have been physically tortured. And if you have eyes washed clear by death stalking around, and if you have feelings embittered by resurrection from the dead, you know by instinct, without words, who has wavered, who has perhaps even turned traitor, or who in some corner of his soul has thought that it perhaps wouldn't be so bad if he were to give himself some slight relief and inform on the least important of his fellow-fighters. You poor faint-hearts! How can that

still be called life which is bought with the life of a comrade?

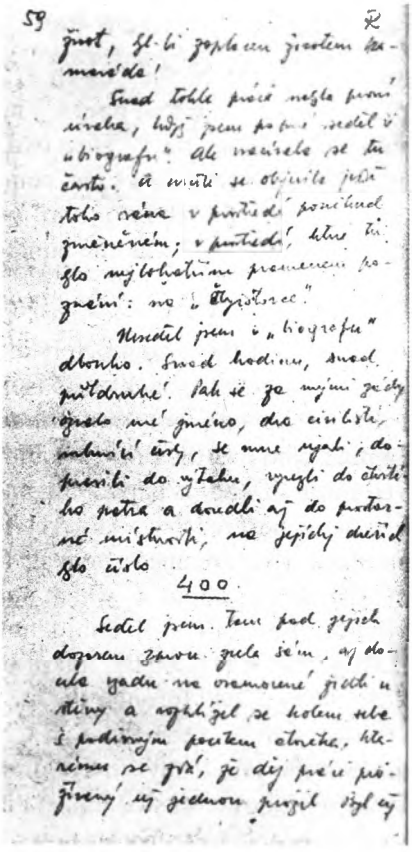
This wasn't perhaps my first reflection when I sat in the "cinema" for the first time. But it often returned to me there. And it certainly made its appearance once again this morning in somewhat changed surroundings–in surroundings which were a most vivid source of knowledge: "Room 400."

I did not sit for long in the "cinema". An hour perhaps, perhaps one and a half hours. Then I heard my name called behind my back. Then two civilians, speaking in Czech, took charge of me, conducted me to the lift and up to the fourth floor until we came to a large room on whose door was the number

400

To begin with, I sat there completely alone under their supervision, right at the back on an isolated chair near the wall, and looked around me with the strange feeling of a man who has the impression that he has already lived through what is happening once before. Have I been here before? No. And yet I know it. I know this place, I've dreamed about it, I had such a cruel, feverish dream about it, which deformed it, distorted it horribly, but still could not make it unrecognisable. Now it is friendly, full of the light of day and clear colours, and through the large lightly-latticed windows can be seen the Týn Church, the green Letná and the Hradčany. In my dream it was gloomy, without windows, dusted with a dirty yellow light in which the people were like shadows. Yes, there were people here. Now it's empty and their six benches, set closely one behind the other, form a cheerful meadow of dandelions and buttercups. In

my dream it was full of people sitting here on the benches one beside the other, and their faces were pale and blood-stained. And there, right close to the door, stood a man with sorrowful eyes, in blue working clothes, longing to drink, drink, and then he slowly sank to the ground like a falling curtain ...



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život, šel-li zoplocen životem kamaráde!

Snad tohle práci mého pomůže, když jsem se pokusil o „biografii". Ale nevěřelo se tu čertu. A mučil se objevila jeho tolik věrná v pantofli zamilovaná zmučeničem, v pantofli, kterou ti zlo mýtohatinu proměnilo pozemní: na „Utajovaný".

Uhodil jsem o „biografii" dlouho. Snad hodinu, snad půldruhé. Pak se za mými zády ozvalo mé jméno, dva cinknutí, nahnívání úst, se mne vyzvali, doprovodili do výtahu, vyjeli do čtvrtého patra a dovedli až do protorní místnosti, na jejíchž dveřích zlo číslo

400.

Sedal jsem. Tam pod jejich dozorem zpovu zcela sám, až dokud nadu na vzmužené jeden a druhý a uzdravil se kolem tebe s podivným pocitem otevřeta, kterému se říká, že dny prší přežitý už jednou prožil byl už

Facsimile of the manuscript in which Fučík describes Room 400.

Yes, that's how it was, but now I know. it wasn't a dream. That cruel and feverish experience–that was reality.

That was on the night of my arrest and first cross-examination. They brought me here perhaps three times. perhaps ten times–how do I know how often?–when they wanted a rest or when they set to work on others. I was barefoot, and the tiled floors pleasantly cooled the bruised soles of my feet, that I remember.

The benches on that occasion were occupied by workers from the Junkers plant. It was the Gestapo's evening catch. And that man at the door in the blue working-clothes, that was Comrade Bartoň from the factory cell at the Junkers works, the indirect cause of my arrest. I say this so that nobody should be accused of having brought about my fate. It was neither treachery nor cowardice on the part of any of the comrades. It was only imprudence and ill luck. Comrade Bartoň was looking for a contact between his cell and the leadership. His friend, Comrade Jelínek, somewhat neglectful of the rules of conspiracy, promised to arrange a contact instead of first talking the matter over with me so as to ensure that it could be fixed up without his being involved. That was one mistake. And the second, more fateful, was that Comrade Bartoň confided in–a provocateur, by the name of Dvořák. Comrade Bartoň confided to this man the name of Jelínek–hence the Gestapo's interest in the Jelínek family, not on account of their main work, which they had carried out well for two years, but because of one little service which had deviated by a hair's breadth from the duty of a conspirator. And the fact that the Gestapo at Petschek Palace decided to arrest the Jelíneks on that

particular night when I had an appointment at their flat, and that they came for them in such strength– was entirely fortuitous. It had not been in the plan, the Jelíneks were to have heen arrested the following day, in fact the Gestapo went to their flat almost, one might say, on the spree, just "to have a breath of fresh air" after the successful unearthing of the cell at the Junkers works. Our surprise at the arrival of the police was in no way greater than theirs at finding me there. And they did not even know whom they had found. Who knows if they would ever have found out if together with me ...

But I arrived at this continuation to my first reflections in Room 400 only after some time. By that time I was no longer alone, by that time the benches and the walls around the walls were occupied, and the hours were flitting by, full of surprises. Strange surprises, which I didn't understand, and evil surprises, which I understood all too well.

The first surprise, however, did not belong in either of these two categories. It was a pleasant, small one, and not important for anybody–***and yet I will never forget it. The Gestapo agent who is watching over me–I recognise him as the same one who turned out my pockets after my arrest–tossed me half of a burning cigarette. The first cigarette for three weeks, the first cigarette for a reborn person! Shall I pick it up? He shouldn't get the idea that I can be bought. But from the casual way he's looking at the cigarette he doesn't want to buy me. (All the same, I didn't finish smoking it. The newborn have never been heavy smokers.)***

The second surprise: four people file into the room in single file, greeting the civilians on guard in Czech–and me as well. They sit down at the tables, open up their briefcases, light cigarettes, freely, absolutely freely, as though they were officials here. But of course I know them, I know at least three of them, surely it's not possible that they're in the pay of the Gestapo–or are they perhaps? They too? Why, that's ***Teringl, or Renek as we called him***, one-time Party and trade union secretary, a rather wild character, but loyal–no, that's not possible. And that's Anka Víková, still as frank and beautiful as ever even though her hair's completely white, a solid, stubborn fighter–no, that's not possible. And that's Vašek ***Rezek***, a waller from a mine in Northern Bohemia and subsequently Party secretary. How could I fail to know him, after the grim moments we've lived through together in the north? Could he ever be bent to their will? No, that's not possible. But what do they want here? What are they doing here?

I have still not found any answers to these questions when still more people begin piling in. They bring in ***Klecan*** and the Jelíneks and the Frieds–yes, that much I know, these, alas, were arrested with me. But why is Pavel Kropáček here as well, the art historian who helped Mirek in his work among the intelligentsia? Who knew anything about him except me and Mirek–***Klecan***? And why is that tall young fellow with his face all slashed about signing to me that we don't know each other? Indeed, I really don't know him. And who's that? Štych? Dr. Štych? Zdeněk?* But,

* *in fact, Dr. Zdeněk Štich*

my God, that means the doctors' group! And who knew anything about that group except me and Mirek–***Klecan***? And why in the course of the interrogation in the cell did they ask me about the Czech intelligentsia? How did they ever come to link me up with the work among the intelligentsia? Who knew anything about that except me and Mirek–***Klecan***?

The answer was not difficult to supply, but it was hard, it was cruel: Mirek had let us down. Mirek had spoken. For yet a short while I was able to hope that he hadn't perhaps said everything. But then, up above, they brought in a further group of prisoners–and I saw:

Vlad. Vančura*, Prof. Felber and his son, Bedřich Václavek, disguised beyond all recognition, Božena Půlpánová, Jindřich Elbl, Dvořák the sculptor, all those who had set up or were to have set up the National Revolutionary Committee of the Czech intelligentsia, all of them were there. ***Klecan*** had given away everything about the work among the intelligentsia.

The first days in Petschek Palace were not exactly easy. But this was the severest blow I received there. I had expected death, not betrayal. And however leniently I judged, however much I considered all the extenuating circumstances, and however much I reminded myself of all that ***Klecan*** had not given away, I could not find any other word than betrayal. Not mere wavering, not weakness, not the complete collapse of a fellow who's been tortured to death and seeks relief in his delirium, nothing that could be excused.

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* *Czech writer, executed by the Gestapo on June 1 1942*

Now I understood how it was that they had known my name on that very first night. Now I understood how Anička Jirásková had got here; I had met ***Klecan*** several times at her flat.

Now I realised why Kropáček and Dr. Štych were here.

I went to Room 400 almost every day, and every day I learnt new details. It was sad and frightening. To think that this had been a fellow with guts, who'd not been scared by bullets when fighting on the Spanish front and who'd not been cowed by his cruel experience of a concentration camp in France! Now he'd paled before the rod in the hands of the Gestapo and ratted to save his own skin. How superficial was his courage if a few blows could rub it away! As superficial as his convictions. He had been strong in a crowd when surrounded by comrades who thought as he did. He had been strong because he had thought of them. Now isolated, alone, hard-pressed by the enemy, he had lost his strength entirely. He had lost everything because he had begun to think of himself. To save his own skin he had sacrificed his comrades. He had given way to cowardice, and out of cowardice had turned traitor.

He did not say that it was better to die than to decipher the material they found on him. He deciphered it. He gave them names. He gave them the address of an underground flat. He brought Gestapo agents to a meeting with Štych. He sent them to Dvořák's flat to a meeting with Václavek and Kropáček. He informed on Anička. He even informed on Lída, a steadfast, courageous girl who loved him. A few blows sufficed to make him tell half of all he knew. And when he believed that I was already dead and he wouldn't have to answer to anybody, he told them all the rest.

He did not harm me in doing so. I was already in the hands of the Gestapo–what could harm me any more? On the contrary, his evidence was something concrete on which the entire cross-examination was based, something which was like the beginning of a chain whose further links were in my hands and which they would have been glad to discover–that was the only reason why I survived after martial law had been declared. and with me a large part of our group. But in point of fact, there wouldn't have been any group at all if he had carried out his duty. We should both have been dead long ago, but others would have lived and worked on after we had fallen.

A coward loses more than his own life. He had lost. He had deserted a glorious army and earned the contempt of the foulest of enemies. And even alive–he no longer lived; because he had expelled himself from the collective. Subsequently he tried to mend his ways a bit, but he was never received back again–which is more terrible in prison than anywhere else.

* * * *

A prisoner and loneliness–these two ideas usually go together. But that is a great mistake. A prisoner is not alone, prison is a great collective, and not even the strictest isolation can tear anybody away from it unless he excludes himself. The brotherhood of the oppressed is here submitted to pressure which concentrates it, strengthens it and makes it more sensitive. It penetrates through walls that live, speak and transmit signals. It embraces all the cells in one corridor which are linked together by common suffering, by common service, by the same orderlies and by the half-hours together in the open air, when a word or a gesture is sufficient to convey some news or save a human life. It unites the entire prison through

the journeys made in common to cross-examination, through the time spent together sitting in the "cinema" and returning together. It is a brotherhood of few words and great deeds because the mere pressure of a hand or a cigarette secretly handed on break the cage into which you have been cast and liberate you from the loneliness which might break you. Cells have hands; you feel how they keep you from giving way when you return in agony from an interrogation, they feed you when others are hounding you to death with hunger. Cells have eyes; they look at you when you go away to your execution and you know that you must go straight because you are their brother and you must not weaken them by a single irresolute step. It is a brotherhood that sheds blood but is indomitable. If it were not for its help, you wouldn't be able to bear the tenth part of your destiny, neither you nor any of the others.

The term, "Room 400", which appears at the head of this chapter, will often recur in the course of this story if I am able to finish it (for we know neither the day nor the hour). I got to know it as a room, and my first hours in it and my first reflections in it were not pleasant ones. But it was not a room–it was a collective. A joyous, fighting collective.

It started in 1940 when the anti-Communist department had its work greatly increased. It was a branch of the "house prison", the "cinema", a branch of the waiting-room for those due to be interrogated, destined for Communists, to avoid their having to be brought from the ground floor to the fourth floor for every question, to keep them continuously within reach of the interrogating officials of the Gestapo. It was a labour-saving device–that was the idea of it.

But put two prisoners together–especially if they are Communists–and in five minutes you have a

collective frustrating all plans. By 1942 it had no other name than "The Communist Centre". It underwent many changes, and thousands and thousands of comrades, men and women, followed each other on its benches. But one thing in it did not change: the spirit of the collective, devoted to the struggle and confident of victory.

Room 400 was a trench thrust deep into hostile territory, surrounded by the enemy on all sides and subjected to concentrated firing, but never for one moment contemplating surrender. Over it flew the Red Flag. But it expressed the solidarity of the entire nation fighting for its liberation.

Down below, in the "cinema", SS-guards patrolled in jackboots shouting at you each time you so much as blinked. Here, in Room 400, those responsible for guarding the prisoners were Czech inspectors and agents from Police Headquarters who had entered the service of the Gestapo as translators, either voluntarily or on the orders of their superiors, and who performed their duties either as servants of the Gestapo or–as Czechs. Or as something between the two. Here you did not have to sit to attention with your hands on your knees and your eyes fixed straight ahead, here you could sit more freely, you could look about you, you could make signs with your hands–and you could do even more, according as to which of the three types of inspector was on duty.

Room 400 was a place where you got the profoundest insight into the animal known as man. The proximity of death stripped each person naked, both those who wore on their left arm the red insignia of Communists under interrogation or of persons

suspected of collaborating with Communists, and those who had guard duty and who sometimes attended the cross-questioning in the nearby room. There, during a cross-examination, words could be a shield or a weapon. But here, in Room 400, there was no hiding behind words. What counted here was not what you said but what was in you. And in you remained only what was fundamental. Everything subsidiary, mitigating, weakening or embellishing the foundations of your character fell away, ravished by the hurricane that precedes death. There remained only the bare subject and predicate: the loyal resist, the traitor betrays, the petty-souled despairs, the hero fights. In every person there is strength and weakness, courage and fear, steadfastness and vacillation, cleanliness and dirt. But here only one or the other could remain. Either–or. And if anybody tried inconspicuously to balance between the two, he was more conspicuous than a person who dances in a funeral procession with a yellow feather stuck in his hat and cymbals in his hands.

There were such people among the prisoners, there were also such people among the Czech inspectors and agents. During an interrogation they burnt a candle to their lord god of the *Reich* and in Room 400 they burnt another to the Bolshevik devil. In front of the German commissar they knocked out your teeth to hammer out of you the name of your contact, and in Room 400 they became so friendly as to offer you bread to stave off your hunger. During a house search they looted your whole flat and in Room 400 they handed you half a cigarette from their booty to show you how they sympathised with you. Others–and these were merely a somewhat different variety of the same

type–never harmed you on their own initiative and helped you still less. They thought always and only of their own little skins. Their sensitivity changed them into excellent political barometers. Are they very stiff and official? You can be sure the Germans are advancing on Stalingrad. Are they affable and ready to talk with the prisoners? The situation is favourable: the Germans are evidently being thrown back at Stalingrad. Do they begin to tell you about their old Czech family and how they were ordered into the service of the Gestapo? Splendid: the Red Army is evidently already advancing beyond Rostov. Others again of this kind stick their hands in their pockets when you are drowning and willingly give you a hand when you climb out on to the bank by yourself.

Inspectors of this type were conscious of the collective of Room 400 and strove to associate with it because they appreciated its strength, but they never belonged to it. And there was another type which was totally unaware of the collective: I would call them murderers, but a murderer belongs to the human family. Czech-speaking beasts with sticks in their hands, torturing Czech prisoners to such an extent that even many German commissars would shrink from the sight of it. They could not even be so hypocritical as to claim any interest in their nation or the *Reich*. They tortured and murdered out of delight, they bashed away at teeth and ear-drums, they crushed eyes, kicked at the sexual organs, uncovered the brain of those they tortured and beat them to death out of sheer cruelty and for no other reason. Every day you saw them, every day you had to be in contact with them and endure their presence, which filled the whole air with blood and shouting; and your only help was

your firm belief that they would not be able to evade justice even if they murdered all the witnesses of their crimes.

And sitting side by side with them at the same table, apparently belonging in the same category, were people who ought in justice to be written with a capital P–people who from prison provisions built up provision for the prisoners, people who helped to create the collective of Room 400 and who belonged to it with all their heart and all their courage. Their greatness is all the more remarkable in that they were not Communists, that, on the contrary, they had formerly worked for the Czech police against the Communists but had recognised the strength of the Communists and realised their significance for the nation when they saw them in the struggle against the occupation, and from that moment had faithfully served and helped everybody who remained loyal even when on the prison bench. Many fighters outside would have hesitated if they had had any idea of the horrors that awaited them when once they fell into the hands of the Gestapo. These here had these horrors continuously before their eyes, every day, every hour. Every day and every hour they could expect to be set side by side with the other prisoners and subjected to a still harder test than they. And yet they did not waver. They helped to save the lives of thousands and lighten the destiny of those whose lives they could not save. To them belongs the title of hero. Without their aid Room 400 could never have been what it became and as thousands of Communists knew it: a place of light in a dark house, a trench in the enemy's rear, a centre of the fight for freedom in the very den of the occupants.

Fučík leading a Czechoslovak workers' delegation in the USSR in 1930.

V

FIGURES

AND LITTLE FIGURES–I

One thing I ask: you who outlive this time, do not forget. Do not forget either the good or the bad. Patiently collect evidence about those who have fallen for themselves and for you. One day today will be the past, people will speak of a great age and of nameless heroes who created history. I should like it to be known that they were not nameless heroes, that they were people who had names, faces, longings, hopes, and that the suffering of the very least of them was not less than the suffering of the first whose name has been preserved. I should like them all to be always near to you, like people you know, like people of your own flesh and blood, like yourselves.

Entire families of heroes were murdered. Learn to love at least one of them, like sons and daughters, and be proud of him as a great human being who lived for the future. Each one who faithfully lived for the future and fell for its loveliness is a figure hewn in stone. And each one who from the dust of the past wished to build up a dyke against the flood of revolution is only a little figure of rotting wood even if today his shoulders are gilded over with insignia of rank. But even these little figures must be seen as living, in their vileness and paltriness, their cruelty and absurdity, for they are material to help the people of the future to imagine this time.

What I am going on to narrate is only material, only the testimony of a witness. Only so many fragments such as I was able to see myself in a small sector and without any perspective. But they contain the features of true likeness: great and small, figures and little figures.

THE JELÍNEKS

Joseph and Mary. He a tram-driver, she a maid-servant. You must know their flat. Simple, smooth modern furniture, a bookcase, a statuette, pictures on the walls, and clean, unbelievably spick and span. You'd say that her whole soul was shut up in it and that she didn't even know anything of the outside world. And yet it's years since she started working in the Communist Party and dreaming dreams of justice in her own way. Both of them worked devotedly and quietly and did not shrink when the occupation put heavy demands on them.

After three years the police entered their flat. They stood side by side with their hands raised above their heads.

* * * *

MAY 19 1943

Tonight they're taking my Gustina off to Poland "for work". To the galleys, to die of typhoid. She has perhaps a few weeks of life left, perhaps two or three months. My file, so I've heard, has been submitted to the court. Perhaps another four weeks of interrogation at Pankrác and then two or three months till the end. This report won't get finished. I'll try to continue with it, if I have the opportunity, in these few days. Today I can't. Today my head and heart are full of

Gustina, generous and warm-hearted being, rare and devoted companion in life which was abrupt and never calm.

Every evening I sing her the song she loved: about the bluish grass of the steppes, vibrant with the glorious legends of partisan struggles, about the Cossack woman who fought for freedom side by side with men, about her bravery and how in one of their fights "she lay unable to raise herself from the earth." *

Hail, beloved, my comrade-in-arms!** How much strength there is in that little creature, with her firmly chiselled face and her large childlike eyes, so full of tenderness! The struggle and continual partings have made us eternal lovers who not once but a hundred times in life have lived the burning moment of the first caress, the first awareness. And yet it is always one beat that unites our hearts, one breath that we breathe in hours of bliss and hours of anxiety, in excitement or sorrow.

For years we have worked together and helped each other as only a comrade can help a comrade, for years she has been my first reader and first critic and how hard it was to write if I did not feel her loving glance at my back, for years we have stood side by side in our struggles in which we have not been poor, and for years we went hand-in-hand wandering over the countryside we loved. We have experienced many hardships and known many great joys, for we have been rich with the riches of the poor, the inner riches.

Gustina? Look, this is Gustina:

It was after martial law had been declared, half way through June of last year. She saw me for the

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* *These words are in Russian and bracketed in the original.*

** *These words are in Russian in Fučík's manuscript.*

first time six weeks after my arrest, after all those painful days alone in her cell when she ruminated on the reports which told of my death. They called her in to weaken my resolve.

"Persuade him," the chief of the department told her in front of me, "persuade him to be sensible. If he won't think of himself, at least let him think of you. You have an hour to think it over. If he still remains obstinate, you will both be shot tonight. Both of you."

She caressed me with her eyes and answered simply: "That's no threat to me, commissar, that's my last wish. If you execute him, execute me as well!"

There, that's Gustina! Love and steadfastness.

They can take our lives, eh, Gustina, but our honour and our love they can never take.

Oh people, can you imagine how we should live if we were to find each other again after all this privation, if we were to find each other again in a free life, beautiful in its freedom and creativeness, when that day dawns for which we have longed and striven and for which we are now going to die? Oh indeed, even dead we shall still live somewhere in a little bit of your great happiness because we have put our lives into it. And this gives us joy in spite of the sadness of parting.

They did not even allow us to bid farewell to each other, nor to embrace, nor even to shake hands. Only the prison collective, linking Charles Square with Pankrác, gives us news of each other's destiny.

You know, Gustina, and I know, that we shall probably never see each other again. And yet I hear you call from the distance: Goodbye, my beloved!

Goodbye, Gustina mine!

* * * *

My will.

I owned nothing but my library, and that has been destroyed by the Gestapo.

I have written many cultural and political articles, commentaries, literary and theatrical studies and reports. Many of them belonged to the day and died with the day. Let them lie. But some of them belong to life. I had hoped that Gustina would arrange them. Not much hope. I therefore ask that best of comrades, Lád'a Štoll, to edit them into five books:

1. Political articles and polemics.

2. Selected articles dealing with home events.

3. Selected articles from the Soviet Union.

4 and 5. Articles and studies on literature and the theatre.

The majority of these are to be found in *Tvorba* and *Rudé Právo*, some in *Kmen*, *Pramen*, *Proletkult*, *Doba*, *Socialista*, *Avantgard* and so on.

The manuscript of my study on Julius Zeyer* is with Girgal the publisher (whom I love for the unquestioning courage with which he published my Božena Němcová** during the occupation): my study on Sabina*** and notes on Jan Neruda are somewhere at the house where the Jelíneks, Vysušils and Suchánek lived, the majority of whom are now dead.

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* *19th Century Czech writer*

** *19th Century Czech writer*

*** *19th Century Czech journalist*

I had begun to write a novel on our generation. Two chapters are at my parents', the rest have probably been destroyed. I saw some of my manuscript stories among the Gestapo's papers.

To the literary historian yet to be born I bequeath my love for Jan Neruda. He is our greatest poet who still sees far beyond us into the future. And still no books have been written which understand him and appreciate him. What must be shown is Neruda the proletarian. They've tacked on to his coat-tails an idyll of Malá Strana and don't see that in the eyes of that "idyllic", old-established Malá Strana "he was a rascal," that he was born on the edge of Smíchov, in a working-class environment, and that to get to the Malá Strana cemetery for his *Flowers from a Cemetery* he had to walk round the Ringhofer works. Without this you won't understand Neruda, from his *Flowers from a Cemetery* to his feuilleton *May Day, 1890*. Everybody–even a man so clear-sighted as Šalda*–sees Neruda's journalism as some sort of barrier to his poetic work. That's nonsense! It was precisely because Neruda was a journalist that he could write such a magnificent work as his *Ballads and Romances*, or his *Friday Songs* and the majority of his *Simple Themes*. Journalism exhausts a man, distracts him perhaps, but it links him with his reader and teaches him to create even in poetry–always granted of course that he's as honest a journalist as Neruda. Neruda without newspapers living the day would perhaps have written many volumes of poetry, but not one would have outlived the century as all his works have outlived it.

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* *Czech literary critic (1867-1937)*

Somebody will perhaps complete Sabina as well. It deserves to be.

For my parents, in return for their love and simple nobility, I wanted to ensure a sunny autumn by all my work, and not only for them. May it not be marred by the fact that I am not with them. "The worker is mortal, work lives on," and in the warmth and light that encircles them I shall be continually around them.

I ask my sisters, Líba and Věrka, to help Father and Mother to forget the gap in our family through their singing. They swallowed back many a tear when they came to visit us at Petschek House. But joy lives in them, and for this I love them, and hence we love each other. They are sowers of joy–let them never cease to be so.

I give a warm handclasp to the comrades who outlive this last battle and to those who come after us. Both on my own behalf and on Gustina's. We have fulfilled our duty.

And I repeat once again: we lived for joy, we went into the struggle out of joy and we die for joy. Therefore let sadness never be linked with our names.

19.V.43 J. F.

MAY 22 1943

Completed and signed. The judicial examination finished yesterday. Things are going even quicker than I expected. It seems they're in rather a hurry with our case. Those accused with me are Lída Plachá and ***Klecan***. His cravenness has proved of no avail to him.

At the judicial examination things were correct and cold to a degree. With the Gestapo it had still been a

piece of life, terrible, but nonetheless a piece of life. There had been passion in it, the passion of fighters on the one hand and the passion of hunters, beasts of prey or straightforward bandits on the other. Some of those on the other side even had some sort of convictions. Here, at the judicial examination, it was merely an office. The big pancakes with swastikas on the judge's lapels show convictions which are absent within the man. They are a shield behind which hides a poor little office-waller anxious somehow to vegetate through this time. He is neither good nor bad towards the accused. He neither smiles nor frowns. He officiates. No blood, only very thin soup.

They wrote away, signed and twisted paragraphs of the law to fit. About six times the indictment mentions high treason, plotting against the *Reich*, planning an armed uprising, and I don't know what else. Each one of these is quite enough in itself.

For thirteen months I've battled for the lives of others and for my own life. With courage and cunning. Their programme includes "Nordic cunning". I think I'm quite good at that as well. I'm losing only because, in addition to this, they've got the axe in their hand.

This struggle, then, is all over. There's only waiting ahead of me now. Two or three weeks before the indictment is complete, then the journey to the *Reich*, waiting for the court, the sentence, and finally 100 days of waiting for execution. That's the perspective. Perhaps four more months, perhaps five. In that time many things can change. In that time everything can change. Possibly. From this point I can't judge any more. However, a speed-up in events outside might even hasten our end. And so things balance out.

It's a race between hope and the war. A race between death and death. Which will come first: the death of fascism or my death? Am I the only one who's asking this question? Far from it, tens of thousands of prisoners are asking it too, so are millions of soldiers and tens of millions of people throughout Europe and the whole world. Some have more hope, some less. But it's all only apparent. The horrors with which capitalism in decay is inundating the whole world threaten everybody in the fullest measure. Hundreds of thousands of people–and what people!–will still fall before those who remain will be able to answer: I have outlived fascism.

It is already only a matter of months and soon it will be only a matter of days. But it is precisely these days that will be the cruellest. I have always thought how sad it must be to be the last soldier who in the last second of war receives the last bullet in his heart. But somebody has to be the last. If I knew that it was to be me, I should like to go straightaway.

* * * *

The short time that still remains to me at Pankrác will not allow me to give this report the form it should have. I must be more concise. There will be more description of people than of the actual time. That, I think, is the most important thing.

I began these figures with the Jelíneks, simple people whom you wouldn't look upon as heroes under normal conditions. At the moment of their arrest they stood side by side with their hands raised above their heads, he pale and she with the flush of tuberculosis under her temples. Her eyes had a rather frightened look when she saw how the Gestapo in five minutes

had turned her exemplary tidiness into a wilderness. Then she slowly turned her head to her husband and asked him:

"What now, Joe?"

He had always been taciturn, words did not come to him easily, speaking upset him. Now he answered quietly and effortlessly:

"We're going to die, Meg."

She did not scream or lose her equilibrium, but only put out her hand to his with a beautiful gesture in front of the muzzles of the pistols pointed at them all the time. For this she earned him and herself the first blow in the face. She rubbed her cheek, looked somewhat astonished at the intruders and remarked almost comically:

"Such handsome young men," she said, and her voice grew louder, "such handsome young men... and... so brutal".

She summed them up correctly. A few hours later they led her out of the office of the "examining" commissar beaten almost unconscious. But they got nothing out of her. Not on this occasion nor on any subsequent occasions.

I don't know all that happened to them in the time when I lay in my cell too ill to be interrogated. But I know that during all that time they said nothing. They waited for me. How many times after this was Joe trussed up with his arms and legs tied behind his back, and how many times beaten and beaten and beaten, but he would not speak until I was able to tell him, or at least show him by a look, what he might say or how he was to answer so that we could lead our interrogators astray.

She was sensitive to the point of morbidity. That was how I knew her before her arrest. But throughout the time at the Gestapo I did not see a single tear in her eyes. She loved her flat. Yet when the comrades outside, wishing to please her, sent word that they knew who had stolen her furniture and were keeping him under watch, she answered:

"The furniture can go to the devil. Don't let them waste their time on it. They've got more important things to worry about and they'll have to work instead of us now as well. First of all, there'll have to be a spring-cleaning, and if I survive that, well, I'll get the house business straight myself."

One day they took them both away, each to a different place. I sought in vain for news of their destiny. For people in the hands of the Gestapo disappear without leaving a trace, scattered around like seed in a thousand different cemeteries. What a harvest will come forth from such a terrible sowing!

Her last bidding was:

"Please send out word that nobody's to feel sorry for me or get scared on my account. I've done what was my duty as a worker and I'll die like that too."

She was "only a maid". She had had no classical education and did not know how once in the past it had been said:

Traveller, announce to the Lacedaemonians that we here lie dead as the laws enjoin us.

THE VYSUŠILS

They lived in the same block of flats, next to the Jelíneks. Also Joseph and Mary. A minor official's

household, a little older than their neighbours. He was a lanky youth from Nusle when they took him off to the army and sent him to World War I. In a few weeks' time they brought him back again with a shattered knee which never got right again. They got to know each other in a military hospital in Brno where she was a nurse. She was eight years older and had left her husband with whom she was unhappily married. After the war she married Joe. Something of the nurse, something maternal, remained permanently in her relationship to him. They were not of proletarian families and did not form a proletarian family. Their road to the Party was somewhat more complicated, more difficult–but they found it. It led across the Soviet Union, as in many such cases. Long before the occupation they had known what they wanted and hidden German comrades in their flat.

In the hardest times, after the invasion of the Soviet Union and during the first period of martial law in 1941, members of the Central Committee met at their flat. Honza Zika and Honza Černý slept there, and most frequently of all I slept there. Here we wrote *Rudé Právo* and made many important decisions, and here I first got to know "Karel"–Černý.

They were painstakingly precise and attentive and always knew just what to do when unexpected situations arose, as happened only too often in the underground movement. They knew how to manage in such cases. Besides nobody would ever have imagined that this good-natured, lanky, unimportant clerk "from the railway" and this "little madam", Mrs. Vysušilová, could be mixed up in anything illegal.

Nonetheless he was arrested shortly after my arrest and I was horrified when I saw him for the first time.

How much would be in danger if he were to speak! But he held his tongue. He was brought here on account of a few leaflets which he had given a friend to read–and the Gestapo never got any further than those leaflets.

Some months later, when lack of discipline on the part of Pokorný and Pixová led to the Gestapo's finding out that Honza Černý lived at Vysušil's sister's flat, they "interrogated" Joe in their usual way for two days to beat out of him the whereabouts of the last of the Mohicans in our Central Committee. The third day he came to Room 400 and sat down gingerly, for living wounds are hellishly nasty to sit on. I looked anxiously at him, questioningly and encouragingly. He replied gaily with typical Nusle pungency:

"When the head's not willing, neither mouth nor arse will speak."

I knew this little household well, how fond they were of each other, how apprehensive they were if they were separated from each other for even a day. Now months passed–how sad it must have been for his wife in that kindly flat over Michle, left alone in years when solitude was three times worse than death. How many dreams she must have woven about how she could help her husband and restore that little idyll in which they had called each other, a little ludicrously, Mama and Papa. And once again she had found the only road: to continue with her work, to work for herself and for him.

New Year's Eve 1943 found her still sitting alone at the table with his photograph in the place where he used to sit, and when midnight sounded she clinked her glass to his, wished him good health, wished for his return, for his freedom.

A month later, she too was arrested. Many in Room 400 trembled. For she was one of those who maintained contact in the outside world.

Not a word passed her lips.

They did not torture her with blows, she was too seriously ill and would have died under their hands. They tortured her in a more terrible way: mentally.

Some days before her arrest they had taken her husband off to work in Poland. Now they said to her:

"Look, it's a hard life there. Even for healthy people. And your husband's a cripple. He won't be able to stand it. He'll perish somewhere over there, you won't ever see him again. And how will you start looking for somebody at your age? But be sensible, tell us what you know and we'll bring him back to you at once."

He'll perish somewhere over there. My Joe! Poor fellow! And who knows what sort of death! They've killed my sister, they'll kill my husband, I'll be left alone, completely alone, how shall I start looking for somebody, yes, at my age... Alone, deserted till the end of my life... And I could save him, they'd bring him back to me... yes, but at what price? That wouldn't be me, that wouldn't be my Papa...

Not a word passed her lips.

She disappeared somewhere in one of the Gestapo's nameless transports. Shortly afterwards came news that Joe had died in Poland.

LÍDA

I first went to the Baxes' of an evening. Only Jožka was at home and a little creature with restless eyes

whom they called Lída. She was still virtually a child, stealing inquisitive glances at my beard and pleased that the flat had acquired some new curiosity with which she might perhaps be able to amuse herself for a bit.

We made friends quickly. It turned out that this child, surprisingly enough, was already nearly nineteen years old, that she was Jožka's half-sister, that her name was Plachá* although she had little of this quality, and that she did amateur theatricals which she loved more than anything else.

I became her confidant which made me see that after all I'm only an elderly gentleman; she told me of her young sorrows and young dreams and ran to me as to an umpire in her quarrels with her sister or the latter's husband. For she was quick-tempered as young girls are wont to be, and spoilt as children born late in a marriage usually are.

She accompanied me when I went out of the house for the first time after six months to take a walk. An elderly gentleman with a limp is less conspicuous going with his daughter than if he were to go alone. Everybody looks at her rather than him. For this reason she went with me on my second walk, for this reason she went with me to the first underground appointment, for this reason she went with me to the first underground flat. And in this way–as the indictment now reads–things developed of their own accord: she became my contact.

She liked the job. She did not worry her head overmuch about what it meant and what good it was.

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* *Plachá in Czech means "shy".*

It was something new and interesting for her, something out of the ordinary which smacked of adventure. That was enough for her.

So long as it was only little things, I didn't want to tell her anything more. Ignorance in the event of arrest was better protection than consciousness of "guilt".

But Lída developed. She became able to do more than just call round at the Jelíneks' to deliver some little message. But by this time she had to know what it was all about. I set to work. It was a school, a regular school. And Lída learnt assiduously and gladly. To look at, she was still the same girl, gay, light-hearted and somewhat roguish, but inside she was already different. She had begun to think. And she grew.

In the course of her work she got to know ***Klecan***. He'd already done quite a lot of work and knew how to make it sound good. She was impressed. Perhaps she didn't recognise the true kernel, but in this case I didn't recognise it myself either. What was important was that through his work, through his obvious conviction, he was nearer to her than other men.

It grew quickly in her and deepened its roots.

At the beginning of 1942 she began timidly inquiring about membership in the Party. I had never before seen her so put out. Never before had she taken anything so seriously. I still hesitated. I went on teaching her and testing her.

In February 1942 she was accepted as a member of the Party through the Central Committee itself. We were returning home on a dark, frosty night. Usually talkative, this time she was quite silent. Finally, when crossing the fields near home, she

suddenly stopped and quietly, so quietly that you could have heard each crystal of snow yielding under our feet, she said:

"I know that this has been the most important day in my life. I no longer belong to myself now. I promise you that I shall not let you down. Whatever happens."

A great deal happened. And she did not let us down.

She maintained the most intimate contact with the Party leadership. She was given extremely dangerous tasks: to re-establish lost contacts and preserve threatened ones. When things got hot for the higher contacts or for a flat, Lida went there and slipped through like an eel. She did it in the same way as before: as a matter of course and with carefree gaiety, but with a firm sense of responsibility.

She was arrested one month after we were. ***Klecan*** had mentioned her in the course of his talking, and then it had not been difficult for them to ascertain that she had helped her sister and brother-in-law to escape and join up with the underground movement. She tossed her head and threw herself into the role of a light-hearted girl who had no idea that she was doing anything she shouldn't and that there might be serious consequences for her.

She knew a great deal and said nothing. But most important of all, she never stopped working. With the change in environment her methods of work changed, her duties changed. But her duty as a member of the Party remained, not to fold her arms whatever sector she was in. She went on carrying out all orders devotedly, rapidly and precisely. When there was need to get out of a tricky situation, to save somebody outside, Lida with innocent face took upon

herself somebody's "guilt". She became an orderly at Pankrác and dozens of totally unknown people owe it to her that they were not arrested. It was nearly a year before this "career" of hers was cut short as a result of the Gestapo's discovering a hidden message.

Now she is travelling with us to the *Reich* to be put on trial. She is the only one of all our large group who has a reasonable hope of living to see freedom. She is young. If we are no longer alive, don't allow her to get lost. She has a lot to learn. Teach her, don't allow her to become stunted. And lead her. Don't allow her to get proud or rest on her laurels. She has proved herself in moments of utmost difficulty. She has gone through fire and shown that she's made of good metal.

MY COMMISSAR

He doesn't belong among the figures. But he's interesting as a little figure and on a slightly bigger scale than the others.

Ten years ago, when you wanted to rattle your small change and settle up with the waiter in the Café Flora in Vinohrady, a tall, thin man, sailing swiftly and noiselessly through the chairs like a periscope on a submarine, would suddenly appear beside you dressed in black and present you with your bill. He had the rapid, stealthy movements of a wild animal and sharp, feline eyes which saw everywhere. You didn't even have to express your wish. He himself notified the waiters: "Third table, large *café au lait* without cream," "Left window, cakes and *Lidové Noviny*".* He was a good head waiter for guests and a good colleague to the other employees.

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* *Czech daily newspaper*

I did not know him then, however. I got to know him much later, at the Jelíneks', when he held a pistol in his hand instead of a pencil and pointed at me: "... that one interests me most."

To tell the truth, our interest in each other was mutual.

He was intelligent by nature and had one advantage over the others: he knew people. He would certainly have been successful in the criminal police. Petty thieves or murderers, isolated and separated from their kind, would not have hesitated to open their hearts to him, being merely concerned about their own skin. But the political police rarely get people of this sort into their hands. Here the cleverness of the police is not matched merely with the cleverness of the trapped individual. It is matched against a far greater force: the individual's convictions, the acumen of the whole to which he belongs. And neither cleverness nor blows are equal to this.

You wouldn't find any very strong native conviction in "my commissar"–as in the others. And if it did happen to exist in any of them, it was linked with stupidity, not with cleverness, not with knowledge of ideas or knowledge of people. If they still, on the whole, had some measure of success, this was because the struggle was an extremely long one and was fought out in a confined space, under conditions which were infinitely more difficult than in any other underground movement. The Russian Bolsheviks used to say that a person who endures two years of underground activity is a good worker. But if things got too hot for them in Moscow, they could still clear off to Petrograd and from Petrograd to Odessa, lose themselves in towns with millions of inhabitants where nobody knew them. Here you've only got Prague,

Prague, Prague, where half the people know you and where a whole pack of provocateurs can be concentrated. And yet in spite of all this we held out for years and there are even some comrades who have been living underground for five years, undiscovered by the Gestapo. This is because we have learnt a great deal, yes, but it is also because though the enemy is powerful and cruel he cannot do much more than destroy.

There are three of them in Department II-A 1 who have a reputation for maximum toughness in rooting out Communism and wear the black-white-and-red ribbon for bravery in the war against the internal enemy: Friedrich, Zander and "my commissar," Josef Böhm. They talk little about Hitler's National Socialism–only as much as they themselves know. They are not fighting for political ideas. They are fighting for themselves, each in his own way.

Zander–a finicking little creature with a touchy liver–is perhaps the most knowledgeable in police methods but still more knowledgeable in money transactions. For a few months he was transferred from Prague to Berlin but he got himself posted back by dint of begging. To work in the capital city of the *Reich* was in his eyes equivalent to being degraded–and a financial loss. A colonial official in darkest Africa, or in Prague, is a bigger man and has better opportunities of putting money into the bank. He is hard-working and likes to conduct an interrogation during his lunch so as to show his energy. And he needs to show it so as not to let it be seen that he is still more energetic unofficially. Woe betide anybody who falls into his hands, but double woe for anybody who has a bank book or securities at the same time. He will have to die as soon as possible, for bank books

and securities are Zander's passion. He is considered an extremely capable official–in this direction. (In this he differs from his Czech assistant and interpreter, Smola, who is a gentleman-highwayman: he will not ask for your life if you give him money.)

Friedrich–a tall, thin, dark individual with evil eyes and an evil smile. He came to the Republic as a Gestapo spy some time during 1937 to help liquidate German comrades in exile. For dead men are his passion. For him nobody is innocent. Whoever crosses the threshold of his office is guilty. He enjoys telling women that their husbands have died in concentration camps or been executed. He likes taking seven little urns out of his drawer and showing them to his captives:

"I accounted for these seven with my own hands. You'll be the eighth."

(Now there are eight, for he has since accounted for Jan Žižka.) He enjoys looking through old records and observing with satisfaction over the dead: "Settled! Settled!" And he particularly enjoys torturing women.

His fondness for luxury is only an auxiliary motive for his police activity. A well-equipped flat or a shop filled with good cloth merely hastens your death, that's all.

His Czech assistant, Nergr, is about half a head smaller–in so far as his figure is concerned. Otherwise there's no difference between them.

Böhm–my commissar–has no passion for either money or dead people, although his tally in these is not much less than in the case of the other two. He is an adventurer with a longing to be Somebody. He has worked for the Gestapo a long time. He used to

be a waiter in the Napoleon Saloon at Beran's* confidential meetings–what Beran himself did not say to Hitler was completed by Böhm. But what was this in comparison with the chance of hunting people, being lord over their life and death, deciding the destinies of entire families!

Things didn't always have to end so sadly to satisfy him. But if he couldn't excel in any other way, he was capable of making them much worse. For what is beauty and what is life compared to the glory of a Herostratos?

He was perhaps the most energetic of all three of them in building up an extensive network of provocateurs. A huntsman with a vast pack of hounds. And he hunted–often for the sheer love of it. Cross-questioning was for the most part merely a boring occupation for him. His main activity was to make arrests, and then to see people in front of him waiting on his decisions. Once he arrested some two hundred drivers and conductors on trams, buses and trolley-buses in Prague, hunting them along their lines, stopping the traffic and creating panic. Then he was happy. And then he released one hundred and fifty of them, pleased to think that in one hundred and fifty families he would be spoken of as a good fellow.

His cases were usually of this type, on an extensive scale but unimportant. I, whom he hunted up by chance, was an exception.

"You are my biggest case," he often said to me quite frankly and was proud that I had been listed among the biggest cases of all. This fact perhaps prolonged my life.

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* *right-wing Czech politician from the pre-Munich period.*

We lied to each other with might and main, ceaselessly but selectively. I was always aware of this, he only sometimes. But when the lie was obvious, we passed over it by tacit agreement. I think that he was not so concerned about finding out the truth as about seeing that no shadow remained on "his big case".

Sticks and iron were not in his opinion the only medium for interrogation. He preferred to rebuke or threaten according as to how he assessed "his" man. I was never tortured by him except perhaps on that first night. But when it suited him, he would lend me to others.

He was decidedly more interesting and more complicated than all the others. He had a greater wealth of imagination and knew how to use it. Once we went to an imaginary meeting at Braník. After this we often sat there in the garden of a pub and looked at the streams of people around us.

"We've arrested you," he remarked once as he considered them, "and look: has anything changed? The people walk as before, laugh or have their worries just as they did before, the world goes on, just as though you had never existed. And among them are sure to be some of your readers–do you think they've acquired a single wrinkle more on your account?"

On another occasion, after a whole day of cross-questioning, he put me in a car and took me through evening Prague to the Hradčany overlooking Neruda Street:

"I know you love Prague. Look! Don't you sometimes want to go back to it? How beautiful it is! And it will be beautiful even when you're not here..."

He was good at playing the role of the Tempter. The summer evening had suffused the city with the nearness of autumn, it was bluish and blurred like a ripening vine and intoxicating like wine, I should have liked to gaze till the end of the world... but I interrupted him:

"...and it will be still more beautiful when you're not here."

He laughed a moment, not evilly but with a touch of sadness, and said:

"You're a cynic."

He often recalled that evening:

"When we're not here... So you still don't believe in our victory?"

He asked because he himself did not believe in it. And he listened attentively when I spoke to him of the strength and invincibility of the Soviet Union. That, by the way, was one of my last "cross-examinations".

"With every Czech communist," I used to tell him, "you are also killing a bit of hope for the German nation. Only communism can save its future."

He waved his hand:

"There is no salvation for us. If we are defeated, you see,"–he drew a pistol from his pocket–"the last three bullets here are for me."

... But this no longer characterises only a figure. It characterises a time in which it is getting late.

A PAIR OF BRACES–INTERMEZZO

Near the door opposite the cell hangs a pair of braces. An ordinary pair of men's braces. An article which I have never liked. And now I look at them with pleasure whenever the door of our cell is open; I see in them a ray of hope.

When they arrest you, they may perhaps beat you to death, but first of all they take your tie, belt or braces so that you shan't be able to hang yourself (although you can just as well hang yourself on a sheet). These dangerous instruments of death are then kept in the prison office until some unknown fate at the Gestapo decides that you have to be sent somewhere else: to work, to a concentration camp or to your execution. Then they call you and hand them back to you with official dignity, but you may not take them into the cell. You must hang them up outside by the door, or on the railing in front of it, and there they hang until your departure, as a visible sign that one of the inhabitants of the cell is ready for an unwished-for pilgrimage.

A pair of braces appeared opposite our cell on the very day when I learnt what destiny had been fixed for Gustina. A comrade in the cell opposite mine is going off to work by the same transport as her. The transport has not gone yet. It was suddenly postponed, apparently because the place it's to travel to has been badly bombed. (Another nice prospect.) Nobody knows when it's due to go. Perhaps this evening, perhaps tomorrow, perhaps in a week or fortnight's time. The braces opposite hang there all the time. And I know: so long as I see them there, Gustina's still in Prague. So I look at them gladly and lovingly as though they were somebody helping her. She gains

a day, two, three... who knows for what this is good. Perhaps this very day can save her.

We all live in this state. Today, a month ago, a year ago–always and only turned towards tomorrow, in which there is hope. Your destiny is sealed, the day after tomorrow you'll be shot–ah, but what may happen tomorrow! Only live till tomorrow, tomorrow everything can change, everything is so unstable, yes, who knows what may still be tomorrow? And the tomorrows pass. Thousands are falling, for thousands there is no next day, but the living continue to live with no less hope: tomorrow, who knows what will happen tomorrow?

The most foolish rumours arise from this, every week some rosy date for the end of the war suddenly crops up, everybody seizes on to it with his mouth extended from ear to ear, every week Pankrác whispers some new joyous sensation which is so gladly believed. You fight against this, you combat false hopes because they do not strengthen but weaken character; optimism need not, must not be fed on lies but on truth, on a clear vision of victory which is unshakable–but the basic fact remains in you: that this very day can be decisive and that the day you gain may help to bring you over the dividing ridge between life, which you do not want to surrender, and death which threatens you.

So few days make up a human life. And still you long for them to pass quickly, quicker, as quickly as possible. Time, fugitive and uncapturable, ceaselessly draining your veins, is your friend. How strange it is!

Tomorrow has become yesterday. The day after tomorrow has become today. And that too has passed.

The braces near the door of the cell opposite still hang there.

VI

MARTIAL LAW 1942

May 27 1943.

It was exactly a year ago.

From the cross-examination they conducted me down to the "cinema". This is the daily pilgrimage of Room 400: at noon down to lunch which they bring from Pankrác, and in the afternoon back again to the fourth floor. But this day we did not return upstairs again.

You sit and eat. The benches are full of prisoners busy with spoons and munching. It looks almost human. If all those who will tomorrow be dead were in this moment changed into skeletons, the noise of spoons and earthenware bowls would suddenly disappear into the rattling of bones and the dry clacking of jaws. But as yet nobody has any presentiment of this. Each one feeds his body with relish so as to be alive for further weeks, months, years.

One could almost use the word comfort. Then comes a sudden violent gust of wind. And once again stillness. Only from the faces of the warders could you perhaps judge that something is happening, and more precisely, a moment later, from the fact that they have called us out and lined us up for the return journey to Pankrác. At midday! That is unusual. Half a day without any cross-questioning when you are worn out with questions to which you have no answer– that's like a gift from God. So it seems. But it isn't.

In the corridor we meet General Eliáš. His eyes are full of excitement, he catches sight of me and whispers amidst the crowd of warders:

"Martial law."

Prisoners have only split seconds for passing on the most important information. He had no time for replying to my mute question.

The warders at Pankrác are amazed at our premature return. The one who takes me to my cell inspires the most confidence. I don't know yet who he is, but I tell him what I have heard. He shakes his head. He knows nothing. Perhaps I didn't hear well. Yes, perhaps. That's comforting.

But that same evening he comes back and looks in on the cell:

"You're right. An attempt on the life of Heydrich.* Badly wounded. Martial law in Prague."

The next morning they fall us in downstairs in the corridor to take us off for cross-questioning. Among us is Comrade Viktor Synek, the last living member of the Central Committee of the Party, arrested in February 1941. A lanky jailer in SS-uniform waves a white piece of paper in front of his eyes on which you can read in thick letters:

"*Entlassungsbefehl*."

"There you are, Jew, you've got it after all. Release order! Fik..."

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* *Acting Reichsprotektor of Bohemia and Moravia, who died from his injuries on June 4 1942*

And pointing to his throat, he demonstrates what awaits Viktor's head. Otto Synek was the first to be executed when martial law was declared in 1941. Viktor, his brother, is the first victim of martial law in 1942. They take him off to Mauthausen: To be shot, as they put it euphemistically.

The road from Pankrác to Petschek Palace and back now becomes the daily calvary for thousands of prisoners. The S.S. on duty in the lorries "are avenging Heydrich". Before the prison vehicle has gone one kilometre, dozens of prisoners have blood flowing from their mouths and heads from blows with revolver butts. It is an advantage for the others if I am in the lorry, because my bearded chin is a source of attraction to the SS, enticing them to make ingenious jokes. One of their favourite amusements is to use it as a strap to hold on to in the jolting lorry. For me it is good training for the cross-questioning which is on a par with the entire situation and ends with the regular:

"If you aren't more sensible by tomorrow, you'll be shot."

There is nothing terrifying in this by now. Evening after evening you hear them calling out names down below in the passage–fifty, one hundred, two hundred people, whom a moment later they load on to the lorries, bound together like cattle for the slaughter-house, and take off to Kobylisy* for mass execution. Their guilt? Primarily the fact that they have no guilt. They have been arrested, they aren't connected with

** suburb of Prague where the Gestapo had an execution ground*

any big case, there's no need to interrogate them at all and hence they're well suited for death. A satiric poem which a comrade read out to nine others led to their arrest two months before the attempt on Heydrich's life. Now they are carried off to their execution–for having approved the attempt. Half a year ago a woman was arrested on suspicion of having distributed illegal leaflets. She denies it. So now they arrest her sisters and brothers and their husbands and wives as well, and execute the lot because the liquidation of entire families is the slogan of this martial law. A postman arrested by mistake stands downstairs by the wall and waits to be released. He hears his name called and steps forward. They line him up in the column of those condemned to death, lead him off, shoot him and find out the next day that it was merely a chance repetition of names, that another man of the same name was to have been executed. So they execute this man as well and everything is in order. To ascertain the exact personal details of people whose lives have been taken–who would waste his time on that! And isn't it unnecessary since the life of the whole nation has to be taken?

I return from cross-questioning late in the evening. Down by the wall stands Vladislav Vančura with a little bundle at his feet containing his things. I well know what that means. He knows it too. We shake hands. I can still see him from up in the corridor, how he stands there with his head slightly bowed and gazing far, far beyond all life. In half an hour they call out his name...

Some days later Miloš Krásný stands at the same wall–a brave soldier of the revolution, arrested in

October of last year, unbroken by torture and solitary confinement. Half turned away from the wall he is quietly explaining something to the warder who is standing behind him. He catches sight of me, smiles, nods his head in farewell and continues:

"This won't help you at all. Many more of us will fall, but you're the ones who'll be defeated..."

Another day at noon, when we are standing at the bottom of Petschek Palace waiting for lunch, they bring in Eliáš. He has a newspaper under his arm and points to it with a smile; he has just read in it about his contact with those who carried out the attempt on Heydrich's life.

"Rubbish!" he says briefly and begins to eat.

He carries on talking about it in high spirits during the evening when he returns to Pankrác with the others. An hour later, they fetch him from his cell and take him off to Kobylisy.

The heaps of dead pile up, no longer counted by dozens or hundreds but by thousands. The ever fresh blood excites the nostrils of the brutes. They "work on" late into the night, they "work" even on Sunday. Now they are all wearing SS-uniforms, it is their feast-day, the festival of slaughter. They send to their death workers, teachers, peasants, writers, office-workers; they kill men, women and children; they murder entire families, they murder and set fire to entire villages. Death by lead stalks through the land like the plague and does not select.

And the individual in this horror?

Lives on.

It is unbelievable. But he lives, eats, sleeps, loves, works and thinks of a thousand things which have no connection whatsoever with death. Perhaps somewhere on his neck there sits an awful weight, but he carries it, neither bowing his head nor collapsing under it.

In the middle of this period of martial law the commissar took me to Braník. It was a lovely Sunday evening in June scented with lime-trees and the last acacia flowers. The road to the tram terminus was not large enough to contain the hurrying stream of people returning from their day out. They were noisy, gay, happily tired, embraced by the sun and water and the arms of their loved ones–only death, only death continuously stalking around and seeking its victims among them could not be seen in their faces. They swarmed, frisky and lovable like rabbits. Like rabbits! Put out your hand among them and pick one of them out for your amusement - they shrink into a corner, but a moment later they swarm on with their cares, their joys, with all their taste for life.

I had suddenly been transplanted from the walled world of prison into this sweeping flood and from the outset I tasted bitterly of their sweet happiness.

Wrongly, wrongly.

This was life which I saw here, life from which I had come, even this here, altogether, life under terrible pressure but indestructible, killed in one and growing in a hundred, life which is stronger than death. And should that be bitter?

Besides: what about us, us in the cells, living right in the middle of this horror–were we made of different stuff?

I sometimes went for interrogation in the police car, in which the guard behaved gently. I would look out of the windows at the streets, at the shop-fronts, at a flower-stall, at the crowds of pedestrians, at the women. If I count nine pairs of pretty legs, I once said to myself, I shall not be executed today. And then I counted, examined, compared, carefully studying their lines, approved and rejected with passionate preoccupation, not as though my life depended on it but as though life was not at stake at all.

As a rule I returned to the cell late. Dad Pešek would be restlessly asking himself the question: will he return again at all? He would embrace me and I would tell him briefly what news there was, who had fallen the day before at Kobylisy–and then we would gobble down our repulsive dried vegetables, sing some cheerful songs or morosely play a stupid game with dice which completely engrossed us. And this would take place in those evening hours when at any moment the door of our cell might open and the message of death ring out for one or other of us:

"You or you, downstairs! Bring all your things! Quickly!"

They didn't call us that time. We survived that period of horror. We think back today on this with amazement at our own feelings. How strangely constituted is man, that he can bear the unbearable!

It is of course impossible for these moments not to have left deep traces in us somewhere. Perhaps they lie like a roll of film hidden in the brain and will begin to develop, develop to madness, one day in real life, if we live to see it. But it may also be that we shall

see them only as a large cemetery, a green garden into which they have sown precious seeds.

Precious seeds which will shoot forth.

Some of the foreign-language editions of Report from the Gallows.

VII

FIGURES

AND LITTLE FIGURES–II

PANKRÁC

Prison has two lives. One is shut up inside the cells, rigorously isolated, from the entire world and yet linked with it by the closest possible bonds wherever a political prisoner is concerned. The other is outside the cells, in the long corridors, in the apprehensive half-darkness, a world in itself, uniformed and more isolated than the world within, a world of many little figures and few figures. This is what I want to tell about.

It has its natural history, and also its history. Were it not so, I would not have been able to get to know it at all deeply. I should have known only the stage effects turned towards us, only their surface, apparently integral and firm, an iron weight pressing on the inhabitants of the cell. This is how it was a year ago, half a year ago. Now the surface is already full of cracks with faces peeping through them–poor, kindly, care-worn, ludicrous faces, extremely varied but always belonging to human life. The weight of the regime presses down upon each member of this dusky world and squeezes out from him into the light whatever is human in him. Sometimes there is precious little, sometimes there is slightly more–the amount distinguishes them and forms types. You will

of course find some who are even complete people. But these come forward of their own accord. They do not need to feel the pinch themselves before helping others who feel it too.

Prison is a joyless institution. But the world outside the cells is sadder than that in the cells. In the cells lives friendship–and what friendship! The sort of friendship that is made at the front, in long periods of danger when today your life can be in my hands and tomorrow mine in yours. Among the German warders of this regime there's mighty little friendship. There cannot be. They are surrounded by an atmosphere of informers, one follows the other and reports him, each one is alone on guard against those whom he officially calls "*kamarád*"; and the best of them who cannot and do not want to be without a companion, seek him–in the cells.

For a long time we did not know them by their names. That was not important. Among ourselves we called them by nicknames which we or our predecessors had given them and which then became hereditary in the cell. Some have as many nicknames as there are cells; that's an average type, neither fish nor crab, here he increased the lunch ration, next door he hit somebody in the face–mere seconds of contact with the prisoners but these seconds imprint themselves permanently on the memory of the cell and create a one-sided image and a one-sided nickname. Sometimes, however, the cells agree on the nicknames, in the case of those whose character is more definite. Like this or like that. Good or bad.

Look at these types! Look at these little figures! They have not been just carelessly collected together.

They are a part of Nazism's political army. Chosen people. Pillars of the regime. Props for its society...

"SAMARITAN"

A tall, stout man with a high-pitched, feeble voice: "SS-Reservist" Rheuss, formerly a school-porter at Cologne. Like all German school-porters he went through courses in first aid and sometimes acts on behalf of the prison medical orderly. He was the first with whom I came into contact here. He dragged me into the cell, laid me on the palliasse, tended my wounds, applied the first fomentations. Perhaps he really helped to save my life. What was this an expression of: a human being? or a course in first aid? I don't know. But it was quite certainly Nazism which appeared in him when he knocked out the teeth of Jews under arrest and forced them to swallow a heaped spoonful of salt or sand as a universal cure against all ailments.

"NOSEY"

A good-hearted, garrulous coachman from the Budějovice brewery, Fabián. He would enter the cell with a broad smile, bringing food, and never do any harm to anybody. You would never believe that he would stand outside the door for hours on end and listen to what was being said in the cell so as to be able to run to the authorities with every ridiculous little bit of news.

–also a brewery worker from Budějovice. There are several of them here, these German workers from Sudetenland. "It is not what the worker as an individual thinks or does that is important," wrote Marx, "but what the workers must do as a class to fulfil their historic task." Those who are here know really nothing about the task of their class. Torn away from it, placed against it, they hang in the air ideologically and will probably do so literally as well.

He came to Nazism to have an easier livelihood. It proved to be more complicated than he had imagined. From that time on he lost his smile. He gambled on Nazism being victorious. It turned out that he was gambling on a dead horse. From that time on he lost his nerve. At night, when he patrolled the prison corridors alone in soft shoes, he unconsciously left traces of his gloomy thoughts in the dust on the light-shades:

"Everything's down the drain," he wrote there poetically, and contemplated suicide.

During the day he harries the prisoners and warders, shouting at them in a piercing, breathless voice so as to overcome his fear.

RÖSSLER

A tall, thin individual with a rasping bass voice, one of the few here who are capable of genuine laughter. A textile worker from the neighbourhood of

Jablonec. He comes into the cell and discusses–for hours on end.

"How I got into this business? For ten years I didn't have any proper work. And twenty crowns a week for the whole family–do you know what sort of life that is? And then they come and say: we'll give you work, come with us. I go–and they give me work. Me and all the others. We can eat. We can get accommodation. We can live. Socialism? Well, yes, it's not Socialism. I thought it would be different. But it's better than it was."

"It isn't? War? I didn't want war. I didn't want other people to die. I wanted myself to live."

"I help bring it about whether I like it or not? And what am I to do now? Have I hurt anybody here? If I go away, another will come in my place, worse perhaps. Shall I help anybody like that? When the war's over, I'll go back to the factory..."

"Who do you think's going to win? Not us? You? And what'll happen to us?"

"End? Pity. I thought it would be different." And he went out of the cell with long, careless strides.

Half an hour later he returned to ask what things were really like in the Soviet Union.

"IT"

One morning we were waiting downstairs in the main corridor of Pankrác to be taken off for interrogation at Petschek Palace. Every day we stood

like this with our foreheads close to the wall so as not to see what was going on behind us. This morning, however, the voice that sounded behind us was a new one to me:

"I don't want to see anything, I don't want to hear anything! You don't know me, but you soon will!"

I laughed. In this form of drill here a quotation from that poor blunderer, Lieut. Dub, in *The Good Soldier Švejk*, was entirely in keeping. And nobody so far had had the courage to make the joke so loud. But a perceptible nudge from a more experienced neighbour warned me not to laugh–perhaps I was mistaken and it wasn't meant to be a joke. It wasn't.

The thing which had said these words behind us was an insignificant little creature in SS-uniform who obviously had no idea who Švejk was. It spoke like Lieut. Dub because it was spiritually akin to him. It answered to the name of Withan, and like Vitan had a long record of service as an N.C.O. in the Czechoslovak Army. It was right: we subsequently got to know it really well and we never spoke of it except in the neuter gender: "it". For to tell the truth our inventiveness had come to an end when we had to find an appropriate nickname for this rich mixture of worthlessness, obtuseness, boastfulness and depravity which was one of the main pillars of the Pankrác regime.

They're heels, as country folk say of these little bragging climbers to wound them in the most sensitive spot. How much spiritual littleness is required to make a man suffer from physical littleness? Withan suffers from it and takes his revenge on everything that is

physically or spiritually greater than he is, which means everything.

Not by hitting people. He hasn't enough courage for that. But by reporting them. How many prisoners have paid with their health because Withan has informed on them, how many have paid with their lives–for it is not a matter of indifference what sort of a record you go out from Pankrác with to a concentration camp, if you get out at all.

He is infinitely ridiculous. He sails along the corridor in solitary dignity and dreams of his great importance. As soon as he runs up against a human being, he feels the need to climb up on to something. When he is cross-questioning you, he will sit on the railing and stay in this uncomfortable position, if need be for an hour, because he is taller than you by a head. When he is on duty during shaving, he gets up on to the steps or walks along on the bench and delivers himself of his profound sentence:

"I don't want to see anything, I don't want to hear anything! You don't know me..."

At the morning half-hour he at least walks on the grass which raises him ten centimetres above his surroundings. He enters the cell majestically like a royal personage and then quickly climbs up on to a chair so that he can do his inspection from a raised floor.

He is infinitely ridiculous but like every nincompoop in an office where decisions are made involving people's lives–also infinitely dangerous. In his limitation is hidden a hope: to make a camel out of a gnat. He knows nothing beyond the task of

a watchdog and hence each slightest deviation from the prescribed order is for him something great corresponding to the importance of his calling. He fabricates offences and crimes against the prison order so that he can go to bed serene in the knowledge that he is somebody. And who here examines how much truth there is in the information he gives?

SMETONZ

A powerfully-built man with an inane face and expressionless eyes, as though Grosz's* caricature of a Nazi shocktrooper had come to life. He used to be a cowman on the Lithuanian border, but surprisingly enough the handsome beasts he looked after left no trace of their nobility in him. The authorities consider him to be the embodiment of German virtues: he is smart, hard, incorruptible (one of the few who do not ask the orderlies for food) but...

Some German scholar, I can't remember who, once calculated a creature's intelligence by the number of "words" it could form. And he ascertained, I believe, that the creature with the least intelligence is the domestic cat which can form only 128 words. What a genius compared to Smetonz from whom Pankrác heard only four words:

"Pass bloss auf, Mensch!"

Twice, three times a week he handed over his duty, twice, three times a week he went through the most

* *German anti-fascist caricaturist*

desperate torture–and it always finished up by being bad. I saw him once when the prison commander ticked him off for the windows not being open. For a moment the mountain of flesh rolled disconcertedly on its short legs, the stupidly bowed head bent over still more, the corners of the mouth fell with the stubborn effort to repeat what the ears had just heard... and suddenly the entire mass roared out like a siren, causing tumult along all the corridors; nobody understood what it was all about, the windows remained closed, only two prisoners, who were nearest to Smetonz, had blood dripping from their noses. He had found a way out.

It was like this every time. To hit people, hit them at sight, hit them and, if need be, beat them to death–that he understood. And only that. Once he entered a cell occupied by several prisoners and hit one of them. The prisoner, who was a sick man, fell to the ground in convulsions. All the others then had to do full-knee-bends to the rhythm of the convulsions until the sick man was completely exhausted–and Smetonz, his hands on his hips and an imbecile smile on his face, looked on contentedly at his successful solution of this complicated situation.

A primitive who remembered only one thing out of all he had been taught: that a fellow can hit.

And yet even in this creature something broke. It was about a month ago. Two of them–he and K.–were sitting in the prison reception office and K. was talking about the situation. It lasted a long time, a very long time, before Smetonz had the first glimmer of understanding something. He got up, opened the office door and cautiously looked out along the corridor;

all was quiet, it was night, the prison slept. He closed the door, carefully locked it behind him and slowly collapsed into a chair:

"So you think...?"

He rested his head in the palms of his hands. A terrible weight pressed down upon the small little soul in the powerful body. He lay back like this for a long time. Then he raised his head and said hopelessly:

"You're right. We can't win now..."

It is a month now since Pankrác last heard Smetonz's war-cry. And the new prisoners don't know what it is, his hand.

THE PRISON SUPERINTENDENT

A shortish man, always elegant, in civilian clothes or in the uniform of an *Untersturmführer*, affluent, self-satisfied, a lover of dogs, hunting and women– that is one side of the man which does not concern us.

The other side–and this is how Pankrác knows him– a rough, boorish, uneducated, typical Nazi upstart, ready to sacrifice everybody to maintain himself. Soppa is his name–if names are of any consequence– and he comes from Poland. It is said he trained as a blacksmith, but this honourable trade passed over him without leaving any results. It is a long time since he entered Hitler's service and won his present position by dint of pushing himself forward. He defends it by all possible means, insensitive and

ruthless to all, whether prisoners or officials, children or old people. There is no friendship between the Pankrác employees of Nazism, but there is nobody so completely without a shadow of friendship as Soppa. The only person here whom he perhaps appreciates and with whom he talks fairly frequently is the prison medical orderly, *Polizeimeister* Weisner. But it would seem that even this is not mutual.

He knows only himself. It is for himself that he obtained his lordly position and for himself that he will remain loyal to the regime to the last moment. He is perhaps the only one who does not think of any other way of saving himself. He knows that there is none. The fall of Nazism is his fall, the end of his prosperous life, the end of his magnificent flat, the end of his elegance (which, by the way, is never ashamed to make use of the clothes of executed Czechs).

That is the end. Yes.

THE PRISON MEDICAL ORDERLY

Polizeimeister Weisner–an odd little figure in the Pankrác environment. Sometimes it seems to you that he doesn't belong here at all and sometimes you can't even imagine Pankrác without him. If he is not in the sick room, he is prowling along the corridors with small, swaying steps, talking to himself and noticing things all the time, all the time. Like a foreigner who has come here only for a short time and wants to take away with him as many impressions as possible. But he is capable of inserting his key into the door and

opening the cell quickly and quietly like the most skilful of jailers. He has a dry sense of humour which permits him to say things full of hidden meaning and at the same time without binding force. You can't catch him on his word. He seeks to approach people but will not allow anybody to approach him. He does not report anybody, although he sees a lot. He enters a cell full of smoke. He gives a loud sniff:

"Hm," he smacks his lips, "smoking in the cells," and he smacks his lips a second time, "strictly forbidden".

But he does not report us. His face is perpetually wrinkled and unhappy, as though he were troubled by some great anxiety. It is obvious that he doesn't want to have anything in common with the regime which he serves and whose victims he tends every day. He does not believe in it, he does not believe it will last and has never believed in it even in the past. For this reason he has not moved his family from Wroclav to Prague, although few officials from the *Reich* let slip this opportunity of eating off the fat of the land in an occupied country. But he is equally incapable of having anything in common with the people who are fighting against this regime; he has not become one with the people.

He was energetic and scrupulous in looking after me. He is like this in the majority of cases and can obstinately put his foot down against prisoners being sent for interrogation if they have been too severely tortured. Perhaps this is to still his own conscience. At other times, however, he provides no help when it is urgently required. Perhaps when he is possessed by fear.

He is the type of little man. Alone between fear of what rules him and fear of what is to come. He seeks some way out. And finds none. Not a rat. Just a very small mouse, caught in a trap.

Hopelessly.

"FLINK"

This man is not a mere little figure. But he is still not a complete figure. A transition case between the two. He lacks the clear consciousness which could make him into a figure.

There are actually two of them like this. Simple people, sensitive, passive to begin with, only amazed at the horrors into which they have fallen, then longing to get out of it all; dependent on others and hence seeking support, led to find it in the right place by instinct rather than by knowledge; they help you because they expect help from you. It is just to give it to them. Both now–and in the future.

These two–the only ones among all the German officials at Pankrác–were also at the front:

Hanauer, a tailor's assistant from Znojmo, returned very early on from the eastern front with frost-bite–self-inflicted. "War is not for people," he philosophises a bit à la Švejk, "there's nothing for me there".

Höfer, a cheerful shoemaker from Bat'a's, went through the campaign in France and deserted from the army in spite of having been promised promotion. *"Ech, scheisse!"* he said and made a contemptuous

gesture with his hand as he has done perhaps every day since then at all his petty worries, of which he has no small number.

They are similar to one another, both in destiny and character; but Höfer is less timorous, more expressive, more complete. "Flink"–almost all the cells are agreed on this nickname for him.

His day on duty is a day of peace in the cells. You do what you like. If he shouts, he winks his eyes to show you that it doesn't apply to you, that it's only because the authorities down below have to be convinced he's showing the proper smartness. In any case it's a vain effort; he doesn't convince anybody, and no week passes without his being given extra duty as a punishment.

"Ech, scheisse!" he waves his hand contemptuously and carries on in the same old way. He's still more of a young, light-headed shoemaker's apprentice than a prison warder. You can catch him with the prisoners in the cell, playing with coins against the wall with passionate enjoyment. At other times he turns the prisoners out of the cell on to the corridor and carries out an "inspection". The inspection lasts a long time. If you are very inquisitive, you peep into the cell and see him at the table with his head on his elbows. He sleeps, sleeps with rapturous pleasure and peacefully; here he has the best protection from his superiors because the prisoners in the corridor mount guard and announce any imminent danger. At least he wants to sleep on duty, since in his hours of rest sleep is scared away by the thought of girls whom he loves above all else.

The defeat or the victory of Nazis?– *Ech, scheisse!* How can this circus possibly last?

He doesn't count himself in with it. This alone would make him interesting. But more than this: he doesn't want to belong to it. And he doesn't belong to it. Have you a hidden message to send to another section of the prison? "Flink" will see to it. Do you need to send a message outside? "Flink" will deliver it. Do you need to discuss something with somebody, to convince him personally and thereby save other people? "Flink" will bring you to his cell and stand on guard–with a certain roguish delight over a successful piece of work. You frequently have to warn him to be careful. When in the midst of danger he is little conscious of it. He does not realise the full extent of the good he does, which makes it easier for him to do still more but hinders him in his growth.

He is not yet a figure. But he is on the way to becoming one.

"KOLÍN"

It was one evening during martial law. The warder in SS-uniform, who conducted me to my cell, made only a superficial search of my pockets.

"What's wrong with you?" he asked me quietly.

"I don't know. They've told me I'll be shot tomorrow."

"Did that scare you?"

"I reckoned with it."

For a moment he ran his fingers mechanically over the lapels of my coat.

"Maybe they'll do it. Perhaps not tomorrow, perhaps later, perhaps not at all. But in these times ... it's as well to be prepared..."

And once again he was silent.

"But if perhaps... Would you like to send a message to anybody? Or: would you like to write? Not for now, you understand, for the future, how you came to be here, if anybody betrayed you, how people behaved... so that what you know won't die with you..."

If I wanted to write? It was as though he had guessed my most fervent desire.

A moment later he brought pencil and paper. I put them away carefully so that they shouldn't be found during an inspection.

And I never touched them.

It was too wonderful–I could not trust it. Too wonderful; here, in this house of darkness, some weeks after my arrest, in the uniform of those who had only shouts and blows for you–to find a human being, a friend, who held out his hand to you to save you from perishing without leaving a trace, to enable you to send word to your successors, to enable you to speak at least for a moment to those who will survive and live on. And now of all times! In the corridors, drunk with blood, they were calling out names for execution with coarse shouting, and horror gripped the throats of those who were unable to cry out. Now at all times, at a moment like this–no, this

was unbelievable, it couldn't be true, it was surely only a trap. What strength must be in a man who on his own initiative gave you his hand under these conditions! And what courage!

About a month went by. Martial law was over. The shouting had died down, the cruel moments had changed into a memory. Once again it was evening and I had just returned from interrogation. Once again the same warder was outside the cell.

"You've escaped, it seems. Was it" - and he looked at me inquisitively, "was it all right?"

I understood the question well. It moved me deeply. But it convinced me more than anything else of his honesty. Such a question could only be asked by a man who had the inner right to ask it. From that moment I trusted him. He was our man.

To look at he was a mysterious figure. He would pace the corridors alone, quiet, shut up in himself, vigilant, observant. You never heard him shouting. You never saw him hit anybody.

"Do knock us about a bit when Smetonz is looking," the comrades in the neighbouring cell once asked him, "so he can see you in action at least once".

He shook his head:

"There's no need to."

You never heard him speaking anything but Czech. Everything about him told you he was different from the others. But you would have found it difficult to say why. They also felt it themselves, but they were incapable of understanding the difference.

He's everywhere he's needed. He brings peace where confusion reigns, encourages where heads are held low; unites where snapped threads threaten new people in the world outside. He does not lose himself in little things but works systematically and on a grand scale.

Not merely at the present time. From the very beginning. With this task he entered the service of Nazism.

Adolf Kolínský, a Czech warder from Moravia, a Czech from an old Czech family, registers himself as a German so as to be able to go and guard Czech prisoners in Hradec Králové and subsequently in Pankrác! This must have caused a great deal of indignation among those who knew him. But one day after four years, the German superintendent of the prison sends for him, brandishes his fist before his eyes and–rather late–threatens him:

"I'll drive those Czech feelings out of you!"

But he's mistaken. It isn't only Czech feelings. He'd have to drive the human being out of him as well, the human being who consciously and voluntarily went to his right place so as to be able to fight and help in the fight and whom continuous danger has merely hardened.

OURS

If on the morning of February 11 1943, they had brought us cocoa for breakfast instead of the usual black decoction of I don't know what, we should not have noticed this miracle. For this morning we caught

a glimpse of a Czech policeman's uniform passing the door of our cell.

Only a glimpse. One step made by black trousers in tall boots, a hand in a dark-blue sleeve raised to the lock, the door pulled to–and the vision disappeared: It was so short that after a quarter of an hour we were already prepared not to believe it.

A Czech policeman at Pankrác! What far-reaching conclusions we could draw from this!

In two hours' time we had already drawn them. The cell door opened once again, a Czech police cap looked inside and a mouth, grinning broadly at our surprise, announced:

"Freistunde!"

Now we could no longer be mistaken. Dark blobs, which seemed to us to be beaming bright, began to appear among the iron-grey uniforms of the SS-warders in the corridors: Czech policemen.

What does this mean for us? What will they be like? Whatever they're like, the very fact that they're here speaks in a clear language. How the regime is hurtling to its end since even where it is most sensitive, in the only support which it has, in its apparatus of oppression, it has to place people from the nation which it wishes to oppress! How terribly short of human material it must be if it even weakens this, its last hope, in order to obtain a few individuals! How long does it expect to last after this?

Of course, they're sure to be specially chosen people, perhaps they'll be even worse than the German warders, already corroded by habit and disbelief in

victory, but the fact, the fact that they are here is an infallible sign of the end.

So we considered.

But there was more than we had at first allowed ourselves to think. For the regime was no longer even able to choose, it no longer had anything to choose from.

On February 11 we saw Czech uniforms for the first time.

The following day we began to get to know them as people.

He came, looked in on the cell, shuffled his feet embarrassedly on the threshold, and then–just as a young kid is filled with capricious energy the moment it starts jumping on all fours–he said with sudden courage:

"Well, gentlemen, how's life?"

We answered him with a smile. He smiled back, and then, once again becoming embarrassed:

"Don't think bad about us. Believe me, we'd far rather go on pacing the streets than stand on guard over you here. But we had to come. And perhaps... perhaps something good will come of it..."

He was delighted when we told him what we thought about this and how we looked upon them. And so we became friends from the first moment. His name was Vítek, a simple, good-hearted fellow, and it was he who had first passed the door of our cell on that morning.

The second, Tůma, was the true type of an old Czech jailer–roughish, vociferous, but fundamentally

good, the sort we used to call an "old buffer" in the prisons of the pre-war Republic. He was not aware of anything exceptional about his position, on the contrary, he was immediately at home in it, and in his own way, always with his coarse-grained jests, he maintained order in the same way as he himself infringed it: here he smuggled bread into a cell, here a cigarette, here he got engrossed in an entertaining conversation about any subject (except the political situation). He did this as a matter of course, it was his idea of a warder's duty and he did not hide it. The first reproof he earned for it made him more careful but it did not change him. He still remained a kindly old buffer. You could not presume to ask him anything big. But you breathed well when he was about.

The third walked about the cell scowling, taciturn, inobservant. Cautious attempts to establish contact with him produced no reaction.

"We haven't had any great luck with him," remarked Dad after a week's observation. "He's the most unsuccessful of them."

"Or the most clever," I granted, somewhat out of opposition, for two opinions in matters of minor importance are the seasoning of life in a cell.

After a fortnight it seemed to me that this taciturn individual winked his eye somewhat more livelily. I returned this insignificant movement which in prison has a thousand meanings. No response. I must have been mistaken.

But in a month's time it was clear. It came suddenly as when a butterfly emerges from a chrysalis. The

chrysalis burst and a living creature appeared. It was not a butterfly. It was a human being.

* * * *

"You're building little monuments," Dad used to say of these character-sketches.

Yes, I want these comrades not to be forgotten who loyally and bravely fought outside and here and who fell. But I want also that the living shall not be forgotten who helped us no less loyally and no less bravely in the most difficult of circumstances. I want such figures as Kolínský and this Czech policeman to come out from the twilight of the Pankrác corridors to the light of life. Not for their glory. But as an example to others. For human duties do not end with this struggle, and to be a human being will continue to call for a heroic heart so long as people are not complete people.

In essence it is only a short story, that of police constable Jaroslav* Hora. But you will find in it the history of a complete human being.

Rądnicko. An out-of-the-way corner of the world. A beautiful countryside, melancholy and poor. His father a glass-maker. A hard life. Grinding toil when there's work, and misery when there's unemployment which exists here in its own right. This either beats you to your knees or raises your head with dreams of a better world, belief in it and the struggle for it. His father chose the second course. He became a Communist.

Young Jarda* rides in a May Day procession among the cyclists with a red ribbon wound into his wheels. He does not forget it there. He takes it with him, not knowing exactly where, somewhere inside himself, when he goes to his apprenticeship, to the lathe shop, to his first job at the Škoda works.

Crisis, unemployment, war, prospects of a job, service in the police force. I don't know how the red ribbon works in him during this time. Perhaps it is rolled up somewhere, laid aside, perhaps even half forgotten, but not lost. One day he is put on duty at Pankrác. He does not come here of his own free will, like Kolínský, with a task which he has set himself beforehand. But he becomes aware of his task as soon as he first looks into a cell. The ribbon unfolds itself.

He inspects the field. He reckons up his strength. His face clouds over with stubborn thinking where to begin and how best to begin. He is not a professional in politics. He is a simple son of the people. But he has the experience of his father. He has a solid core around which his determination accumulates. And he decides. From the cloudy chrysalis there issues forth a human being.

And it is a human being who is innerly fine, of rare purity; sensitive, shy and yet manly at the same time. He undertakes everything which is necessary here, whatever the risk. Both small things and big things are necessary. He does both the small things and the big things. He works without any show, quietly, prudently but fearlessly. He takes everything as a matter of course. The categorical imperative in him. That's how it must be–so what's the point of talking about it?

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* *diminutive form of Jaroslav*

And that is really–all. That is the entire story of one figure who today can already reckon to his credit the saving of some human lives. These people live and work outside because one man at Pankrác has carried out his duty as a human being. They do not know him and he does not know them. Just as they don't know Kolínský. I should like them to know them at least in retrospect. These two here found the road to themselves quickly. And this multiplied their usefulness.

Remember them as an example, as an example of a human being who has his head, and first and foremost his heart, in the right place.

DAD SKOŘEPA

If you sometimes happen to see all three of them together, you have a living picture of brotherhood: the iron-grey uniform of the SS-warder–Kolínský; the dark Czech police uniform–Hora; and the light but joyless uniform of the prison orderly–Dad Skořepa. But you see them together only rarely, very rarely. For the very good reason that they belong to one another.

According to prison regulations, "only prisoners who are specially reliable, disciplined and strictly isolated from the others" may be used for work in the corridors, for keeping the place tidy and taking food round. That is the letter of the law. A dead letter, still-born, woefully so. Orderlies of this kind do not exist and never have existed, particularly in Gestapo prisons. On the contrary, the orderlies here are feelers

put out from the cells by the prison collective to bring it close to the free world, to enable it to live, to enable it to communicate with its contacts outside. How many orderlies have paid with their lives on account of instructions which have been betrayed or a hidden message which has been discovered on them! But the law of the prison collective is relentless in demanding of those who come to fill their place that they continue in their dangerous work. Go into it with courage or be afraid of it–you still won't get out of it. Through fear you can only spoil a great deal, you can even lose everything–as in all underground work.

And this is underground work raised to the nth degree: right in the very hands of those who want to destroy it, before the eyes of the warders, in the place which they appoint, in the seconds which they choose, in the conditions which they create. Everything you have learnt outside is little here. And yet it makes no less demands on you.

There are masters of underground work outside. And there are masters of this work among the orderlies. Dad Skořepa is a master in it. Modest, unpretentious and quiet to look at–and as mobile as a fish. The warders praise him: look how he sweats away, how reliable he is, how he looks only to his duties and won't let himself be enticed into doing anything that isn't allowed; orderlies, take him as an example!

Yes, orderlies, take him as an example! He's a truly model orderly in the sense that a prisoner understands. The stoutest and most sensitive feeler in the prison collective.

He knows the inhabitants of the cells, every newcomer from the first moment; why he is there,

who are his contacts, what he's like and what they're like. He studies "cases" and tries to get to the bottom of them. This is important if he is to give advice and deliver messages correctly.

He knows the enemy. He carefully scrutinises every warder, his habits, his strong and weak sides, in what things he has to be specially watched, in what way he can be used, how he can be lulled to sleep, how he can be outwitted. Many of the characteristic features I have noted were originally formulated by Dad Skořepa. And he knows them all, he can sketch each one separately and each one well. This is important if he is to have freedom of movement in the corridors and the certainty of being able to work effectively.

And above all he knows his duty. He is a Communist who knows that there is no place where he may cease to be a Communist, where he may fold his arms and "stop being active". I would even say that here, where the danger is greatest and oppression hardest, he has found his true place. Here he grew to maturity.

He is flexible. Every day and every hour new situations arise, requiring different methods. He finds them shrewdly and swiftly. He has only fractions of minutes at his disposal. He taps on the door of a cell, listens to a prepared message, and delivers it concisely and clearly at the other end of the passage before a new patrol comes up the stairs to the first floor. He is wary and has great presence of mind. Hundreds of hidden messages have passed through his hands–not one has been discovered, or even given rise to suspicion.

He knows who and where the boot pinches, where encouragement is required, where it is necessary to give an exact report on the situation outside, where

the sight of his truly paternal eyes can give strength to a man in whom despair is growing, where an extra little loaf of bread or a ladleful of soup can tide over the extremely trying transition to "prison hunger" - he knows this, recognises it with his fine sensitivity and profound experience, and acts accordingly.

He is a fighter, strong and fearless, an unalloyed human being. Such is Dad Skořepa.

I should like you who will perhaps one day read this to see in him not only Dad Skořepa but the entire magnificent breed of the *"Hausarbeiter"* who was able to turn work, which the oppressors demanded of him for themselves, completely to the advantage of the oppressed. Dad Skořepa is unique, but his breed has any amount of types, figures with different human characteristics but no less great. Both at Pankrác and at Petschek Palace. I should like to paint their several portraits, but alas, I have only a few hours left, so few even for "the song which is so briefly sung even though we live so long".

At least, then, a few names, a few examples, which are far from being all that ought to be remembered:

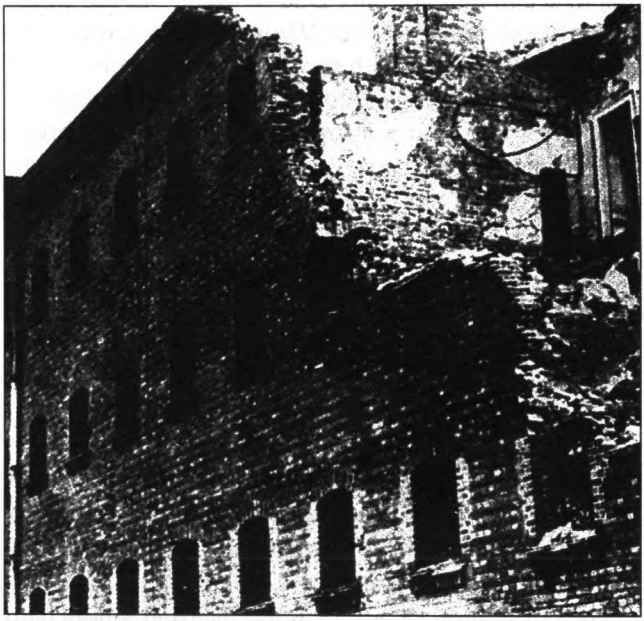
"Renek"–Josef Teringl, a hard and excitable man, with whom a piece of the Petschek Palace's history and our resistance in it is connected, as it is with his inseparable comrade, the good-natured Pepík Bervida.

Dr. Miloš Nedvěd, a fine, noble-hearted fellow who paid with his life at Auschwitz for the daily help he gave to his imprisoned comrades.

Arnošt Lorenc, whose wife was executed because he refused to betray his comrades and who a year later himself went to his execution in order to save his fellow *Hausarbeiters* at Room 400 and the entire collective there.

The splendidly, indomitably witty Vašek ***Rezek***, the reserved, profoundly self-sacrificing Anka Viková, executed during martial law, the energetic ,* Springer,** the "librarian", always cheerful, adroit and ever inventive in finding new ways, the gentle young Bílek...

Only examples, only examples. Figures greater or lesser. But always figures. Never little figures.



Plötzensee Prison in Berlin after it was bombed, shortly before the mass executions which also claimed Fučík's life.

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* *Fučík left out the name.*

** *in fact, Špringel*

VIII

A PIECE OF HISTORY

June 9 1943.

In front of my cell hangs a belt. My belt. The sign of transport. Tonight they will be taking me off to the *Reich* to be tried and–and so on. Time is hungrily biting off the last morsel from the little slice of my life. Four hundred and eleven days at Pankrác have passed incomprehensively swiftly. How many more still remain to me? And where? And what sort of days?

But I shall hardly have the chance of going on writing in them. So then, my last testimony. A piece of history for which I am evidently the last living witness.

* * * *

In February 1941, the entire Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia was arrested, including the reserve leadership which had been prepared for such an evil moment. It has not yet been fully ascertained how it was possible that such a terribly cruel blow could befall the Party. Perhaps the Gestapo commissars will one day throw light on this when they come to be cross-questioned. My attempts to get to the bottom of it, even when I was a *"Hausarbeiter"*, have been in vain. It was certainly due in part to provocation but also to considerable negligence. Two years of successful underground work had somewhat lulled the comrades into relaxing their vigilance. The underground movement had grown in extent, new comrades were continually being

drawn into it, including those who ought to have been kept out for other purposes, the apparatus had become spread out and too complicated to allow of control. The blow at the headquarters of the Party had evidently been prepared a long time and came at a moment when everything was ready for the attack on the Soviet Union.

To begin with, I did not know the full extent of the arrests made. I waited for the normal contacts, but in vain. After a month, however, it was clear that something of the first magnitude had happened and that I must not merely wait. I searched for contacts myself, and others searched for them too.

The first person I found was Honza Vyskočil, the leader of the Central Bohemia region. He was a man of initiative and had already prepared some material for *Rudé Právo* so that the Party should not be left without its central paper. I wrote the leading article, but we agreed that the material (which was new to me) would be issued as a May Day pamphlet and not as *Rudé Právo*, because the latter had already been published in a sort of emergency edition.

There began months of partisan work. The Party had suffered a very heavy blow but it could not be killed by it. Hundreds of new comrades took up the tasks that had been left, new determined men and women came to fill the places of the fallen leaders and refused to allow the foundations of the organisation to disintegrate or lapse into passivity. But there was still no Party centre, and in partisan work there was concealed the danger that at the most important moment–the expected attack on the U.S.S.R.–there would not be complete unity of action.

In *Rudé Právo*–still being issued on a partisan footing–which I got hold of, I recognised an experienced political hand. In our May Day paper, which was unfortunately not quite so well got up as it might have been, others saw that here too somebody was speaking who could be counted on. And we began to seek one another out.

It was a search in a deep forest. We would hear a voice and go after it–and then it would sound from the exact opposite side. After its heavy loss the entire Party had become more cautious, more vigilant, and two people in the central apparatus who wanted to get to each other had to thread their way through a thicket of experimental obstacles and detectors which they each placed against the other and which were of course also placed by others who were maintaining contact. It was all the more complicated in that I did not know who was on the other side in the same way as he did not know whom he was looking for.

Then we finally discovered a common denominator–a fine chap, Dr. Miloš Nedvěd, who became our first contact. There was a certain amount of chance in this as well. In the middle of June 1941, I fell ill and I sent Lída to ask him to come and look after me. He at once came to the Baxes' flat–and there we came to an understanding. He had also been given the task of looking for "the other" but he had no idea that it was me. On the contrary, he, like everybody else on the other side, was convinced that I had been arrested and was probably already dead.

On June 22 1941, Hitler invaded the Soviet Union. The same evening Honza Vyskočil and I issued a leaflet about what this meant for us. On June 30, I

had my first meeting with the man I had been looking for so long. He came to the flat which I had fixed because he already knew whom he was to meet. I as yet did not know. It was a summer night, through the open window came the scent of acacias, it was a fitting moment for a lovers' meeting. We blacked out the window, put the light on and–embraced each other. It was Honza Zika.

So after all, the entire Central Committee had not been arrested in February 1941. Zika was the one member, the only one, who had escaped. I had known him a long time and had long been fond of him. But I only really got to know him now when we worked together. A tubby, smiling fellow with something permanently uncle-like about him–and hard, uncompromising, resolute and decisive in Party work. For himself he neither knew nor wanted to know anything but his duty. He renounced everything to carry it out. He loved people and was loved by them, but never bought their love by turning a blind eye to their faults.

We came to an understanding in a few minutes. And a few days later I got to know the third member of the new leadership who had been in contact with Zika since May: Honza Černý. A tall, handsome fellow, magnificent in his contact with people, who had fought in Spain, whence he had returned across Nazi Germany during the war with a shot through his lung, always somewhat of a soldier, with rich experience of underground work, talented and of unfailing initiative.

Months of uphill struggle linked us in a magnificent comradeship. All three of us supplemented each other

by our characters and abilities. Zika–the organiser, factual, scrupulous in his attention to detail, not allowing himself to be misled by circumlocution, boring down into every piece of news until he had got to the bottom of it, examining every proposal from all sides, kind but firm in checking up on the carrying out of each decision. Černý–in charge of sabotage and preparations for armed resistance, thinking in military terms, inventive, bold in his designs, full of verve, tireless and happy in seeking new forms and new people. And I–propaganda agitator, journalist, relying on my instinct, somewhat of a visionary but balanced by my critical spirit.

The distribution of functions was of course more a distribution of responsibility than work. For each of us had to concern himself with everything, and on his own initiative; wherever he might be required. It was not easy to work. The wound inflicted on the Party in February was still open and was never completely healed. All the contacts had been torn to pieces, in places complete sectors had caved in, others sectors were well manned but there was no road to them, entire organisations, entire factories, even entire regions, were isolated for months before contact with them was re-established, and we had to rely at least on the central paper getting into their hands to give them general directives. There were no flats–we could not use the old flats because they might still be in danger; to begin with, there was no money, it was exceedingly difficult to provide food* for the underground workers, and many things had to be

* *Food coupons were only issued to those who were properly registered with the police.*

begun again from the beginning... And all this in a time when the Party could not confine itself to building up and preparing, in the time of the attack on the Soviet Union, when the Party had to play a direct part in the struggle, organise the home front against the occupants, conduct a miniature war against them–not only with its own forces but with those of the entire nation. In the years of preparation, 1939-41, the Party had worked deep underground, concealed not only from the German police but also from the nation. Now, after its heavy losses, it had to strengthen and perfect its underground work against the occupants but at the same time it had to come out of the underground as far as the nation was concerned, it had to establish contact with non-Party people, go out to the whole nation, negotiate with everybody who was resolved to fight for freedom and draw those who still hesitated into playing an active part in this determined struggle.

By the beginning of September 1941, we were able to say for the first time, not that we had restored a severely damaged organisation–alas! that was far from the case–but that we once again had a firmly organised nucleus capable at least in part of tackling the bigger tasks alone. The influence of the Party was immediately apparent. Sabotage increased, strikes in the factories increased–by the end of September they had imposed Heydrich upon us. The first period of martial law did not break the growing active resistance. But it slowed it down and inflicted new wounds on the Party. The Prague region and the youth organisation were particularly affected; new individuals, so valuable for the Party, were struck

down: Jan Krejčí, Štancl, Miloš Krásný and many others.

But after each blow you saw once again how indestructible the Party is. A fighter fell–and if he could not be replaced by one, two or three stepped into his place. We entered the New Year with our organisation firmly built up, still not yet embracing everything, still far from achieving the same broad extent as in February 1941, but nonetheless capable of carrying out the tasks of the Party in decisive battles. The work was divided out among us all. However, the credit for this goes first and foremost to Honza Zika.

There is no need for me to talk about what the press did; enough evidence of this will perhaps be found in attics and cellars, in the comrades' secret archives. Our papers were widely distributed and were read not only in the Party but also outside the Party; they were issued in considerably large editions from several independent underground "workshops" (on duplicating machines), strictly isolated from one another, and also printed. The issues were got out regularly and swiftly, as the situation demanded. For instance, Comrade Stalin's army order of February 23 1942 reached our readers on the evening of February 24. Excellent work was done by the printers, the doctor's "workshop" and, in particular, the "Fuchs-Lorenz workshop" which also published its own information paper, *The World Against Hitler*. Everything else I did myself so as to avoid further cadres being endangered. A successor was ready to take over from me in the event of my falling out. He took up the work when I was arrested and is still working today.

The apparatus we built up was of the simplest so that as few people as possible should be occupied with any one task. We broke up the long chain of contacts which–as had been shown in February 1941–was a danger rather than a protection for the apparatus. It is true that this meant more danger for each one of us, but it was much safer for the Party. There could thus be no repetition of the sort of disaster which overtook it in February.

Because of this the Central Committee, completed with a new member, was able quietly to continue with its work after I had been arrested. Not even my closest fellow-worker had any idea of it.

Honza Zika was arrested on the night of May 27 1942. Once again it was a piece of ill-luck. It was the night after the attempt on the life of Heydrich when the entire apparatus of the occupants was on its toes and people were being rounded up all over Prague. The Gestapo also entered the flat in Střešovice where Zika was at that time in hiding. His papers were in order and he would certainly have escaped their attention. But he did not want to put a good family in danger and attempted to slip out by the window on the second floor. In doing so he fell and was taken to the prison hospital with serious spinal injuries. They had no idea whom they had got into their hands. It was only after eighteen days that they were able to establish his identity by comparing photographs and carried off the dying man to Petschek Palace for interrogation. Here we saw each other for the last time when they brought us face to face. We shook hands, he smiled at me with his broad, lovable smile and said:

"Farewell, Julius!"

That was all they heard from him. He did not utter a single word more. After a few blows in the face he fainted. And in a few hours he passed away.

I knew of his arrest as early as May 29. The feelers worked well. By means of them I partly came to an agreement with him about what action I should take. This was then additionally approved in broad lines by Honza Černý. It was our last decision.

Honza Černý was arrested in the summer of 1942. This was not due to chance but to gross indiscipline on the part of Jan Pokorný who was in contact with him: Pokorný did not conduct himself as a leading functionary should. After a few hours of cross-examination–true, hard enough, but what else could he expect?–after a few hours of cross-examination he gave way to panic and betrayed the flat where he and Černý had met. From there the trail led to Honza who fell into the hands of the Gestapo a few days later.

We were confronted with one another immediately after they brought him in.

"Do you know him?"

"No."

We each answered the same thing. After this he refused to say a word. His old wound saved him from lengthy torture. He fainted very soon. Before he went to be interrogated a second time, he had already been given precise information and took precautions accordingly.

They did not get anything out of him. They kept him in custody and waited a long time in the hope that some new piece of evidence might force him to talk. But all in vain.

Prison did not alter him. Lithe, gay and brave, he continued to point the road forward for the living although he himself had only the road of death in front of him.

They took him away from Pankrác suddenly at the end of April 1943. I do not know where. This sudden way in which people disappear here always has something ominous about it. You may of course be mistaken. But I do not think we shall ever see each other again.

Fučík

Fučík's last letter from his Berlin prison (August 31 1943).

We have always reckoned with death. We have always known: if we fall into the hands of the Gestapo, that means the end. This has always governed our actions, even here. ***Now perhaps an explanation is needed of why, after a certain time, I began to act rather differently.***

For seven weeks I had told them nothing. I knew that nothing I said could save me, but on the other hand it could endanger the comrades outside. My activity lay in silence.

But Klecan had talked. There were already some people from the ranks of the intelligentsia here. And martial law had been imposed. There were mass arrests and executions without long interrogations. The Gestapo was speculating : If Vančura was involved, why not also others? Why not S.K.Neumann? Why not Halas? Why not Olbracht?* These three were directly indicated to me as the authors of articles in Rudé Právo. Their arrest was hanging in the balance. And arrest meant certain death. Others were also in danger : Nezval, Seifert, both of the Vydras, Dostal** and, for reasons quite unknown to me, even Frejka and someone as highly elemental as Bor. If I was

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* *Neumann and Halas were leading Czech poets and Olbracht a prominent novelist and journalist. (Nezval and Seifert, mentioned a few lines later, were also well-known poets. Seifert eventually became a Nobel Laureate.)*

** *the members of the underground National Revolutionary Committee of the Intelligentsia*

suddenly to become garrulous in front of the Gestapo, I would not be able to do them much harm. But this was not the issue now. The issue was something else : could I save them by my silence? Was my silence still active? Or was it passive?

I had to answer this question. And I did. I am not inattentive to the things happening around me and to those I have to deal with. Seven weeks in the hands of the Gestapo had taught me a lot. I had got to know the all-powerful people here, their methods and their level. I knew that here too there was an opportunity for struggle; by quite different means than from outside, but with the same purpose and the same objective. To remain silent would mean wasting this opportunity. Now something more was needed, so that I could say that I had done my duty in every place and in every situation. It was necessary to begin "putting on a show". Not for my own sake–that would have got me nowhere very quickly–but for the sake of others: They were expecting something sensational from me. I gave it to them. They promised me a lot if I talked. So I "talked". As you will see from the records of my interrogation.

The results were even better than I expected. I diverted their attention elsewhere. They forgot about Neumann, Halas and Olbracht. They left the Czech intelligentsia in peace. I even also managed to secure the release of the arrested Božena Půlpánová and Jindřich Elbl, as they will confirm. And more. I won the Gestapo's confidence and

continued. For several months they chased after a phantom, which–like every phantom–was larger and more tempting than reality. And the reality outside could in the meantime get on with its work and grow to a size surpassing that of any phantom. I was then able even directly to intervene in cases being dealt with here, and these interventions "were not without consequences". It was the only work which, as a "hausarbeiter" at Petshek Palace, I did honestly.

The reward, which I had not reckoned with, was that I delayed my death and gained time which could perhaps have helped me.

For a year I was writing a stage play with them in which I reserved the leading role for myself. Sometimes it was entertaining, sometimes exhausting, but it was always dramatic. Every play has its own ending. Climax, crisis and dénouement. The curtain falls. Applause. Spectators, go home to bed!

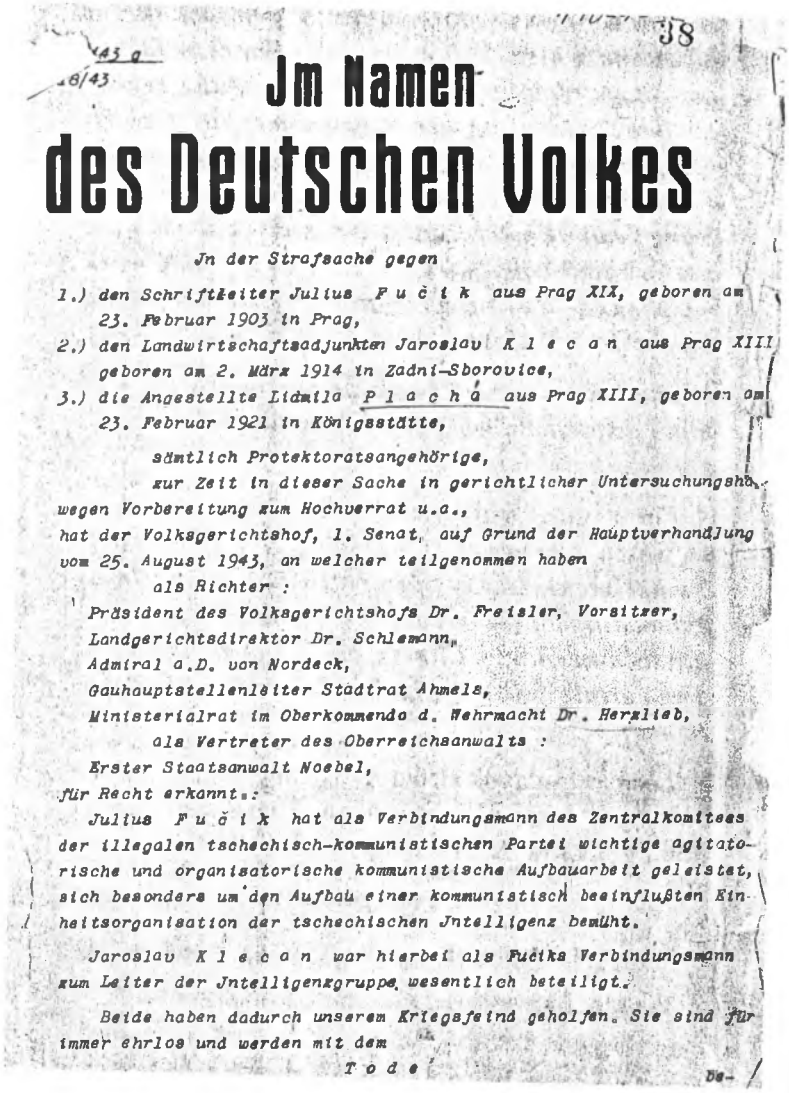
Look, my play is also approaching its end. That's something I haven't yet written. That's something I don't yet know. It's no longer a play. It's life.

And in life there are no spectators.

The curtain goes up.

People, I have loved you. Be on your guard!

9. 6. 43.



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Im Namen des Deutschen Volkes

In der Strafsache gegen

1.) den Schriftleiter Julius F u č í k aus Prag XIX, geboren am 23. Februar 1903 in Prag,
2.) den Landwirtschaftsadjunkten Jaroslav K l e c a n aus Prag XIII geboren am 2. März 1914 in Zadní-Sborovice,
3.) die Angestellte Ludmila P l a c h á aus Prag XIII, geboren am 23. Februar 1921 in Königsstätte,

sämtlich Protektoratsangehörige,
zur Zeit in dieser Sache in gerichtlicher Untersuchungshaft

wegen Vorbereitung zum Hochverrat u.a.,
hat der Volksgerichtshof, 1. Senat, auf Grund der Hauptverhandlung vom 25. August 1943, an welcher teilgenommen haben

als Richter :
Präsident des Volksgerichtshofs Dr. Freisler, Vorsitzer,
Landgerichtsdirektor Dr. Schlemann,
Admiral a.D. von Nordeck,
Gauhauptstellenleiter Stadtrat Ahmels,
Ministerialrat im Oberkommando d. Wehrmacht Dr. Herzlieb,
als Vertreter des Oberreichsanwalts :
Erster Staatsanwalt Noebel,

für Recht erkannt:

Julius F u č í k hat als Verbindungsmann des Zentralkomitees der illegalen tschechisch-kommunistischen Partei wichtige agitatorische und organisatorische kommunistische Aufbauarbeit geleistet, sich besonders um den Aufbau einer kommunistisch beeinflußten Einheitsorganisation der tschechischen Intelligenz bemüht.

Jaroslav K l e c a n war hierbei als Fučíks Verbindungsmann zum Leiter der Intelligenzgruppe wesentlich beteiligt.

Beide haben dadurch unserem Kriegsfeind geholfen. Sie sind für immer ehrlos und werden mit dem

T o d e

be-

Facsimile of the death sentence.

AFTERWORD

by Dr. Hana Hrzalová, CSc.

NO MORE FASCISM!

(a word in explanation)

This edition of Fučík's *Report from the Gallows* for English-speaking readers is the authentic, unexpurgated version of what is a unique literary work. After the second world war an incomplete version of Fučík's book was widely published in the Czech lands and also abroad: since 1945 a total of 38 Czech and 320 foreign-language editions have appeared. The Czech editions alone account for more than a million copies.

In its origin, history, character and effects, Fučík's *Report* defies traditional literary norms and conventions.

It is one of the texts which originated during the second world war in countries occupied or temporarily taken over by the Nazi German military and bureaucratic-political machine. They were written secretly, *incognito*, in prison cells, in illegal flats and in the hiding places where people took refuge from persecution by the Nazis, daily risking their lives in the struggle against them. It was not easy to preserve these works for the future, and often it was only literally miraculous that they survived–thanks to human courage, self-sacrifice and ingenuity. Each of these texts is original and unrepeatable, having value both as testimony and documentation.

Shortly after the war the notes of a Jewish girl, Anne Frank, written when she was hiding with her family in a house in Amsterdam, became world-famous (*The Diary of Anne Frank*, 1947). Even these suffered the same fate as other "illegal" writings which were published posthumously: their authenticity was challenged. They were deemed to be ingenious literary hoaxes. A full critically-evaluated edition of her writings did not appear until the 80s.

Unlike *The Diary of Anne Frank*, the last reportage of the Czech communist journalist Julius Fučík, arrested on 24 April 1942, was from its inception planned and from its first page conceived and composed as a literary work. It had a title page stating the name of the work and the place and time of the manuscript's origin–the Gestapo prison at Pankrác, Prague in the spring of 1943. And therefore roughly nine months after a warder wearing an SS-uniform, the Czech-German Adolf Kolínský, visited Fučík with pencil and paper and suggested that he try to record what should be known "to the future".

Fučík thought the offer over for a long time, since he did not believe the man in the hated uniform. In the spring of 1943, however, he accepted it. He had only one condition, which Kolínský referred to after the war: "It's up to you to make sure that nobody gets hold of it. You know that nothing more can happen to me. I will hang for sure."

When Kolínský, and later also the Czech guard Jaroslav Hora, were on duty, they took a total of 167 pencils and several lengths of lavatory paper to Cell No.267. While they stood guard outside, Fučík wrote. Sometimes only two sheets at a time, on other

occasions as many as seven. Fučík knocked on the door if he wanted the warder to sharpen his pencil. He returned the sheets to the warder the same day. Kolínský hid them in a cistern pipe in the lavatory, and in the evening took them out of Pankrác in his briefcase. He hid them at the home of the Závodskýs in Humpolec, a town about 100 kilometres east of Prague. In the summer of 1945 they were taken from there and handed over to Fučík's wife Gusta, who had returned from the Ravensbrück concentration camp in the spring of the same year.

Thanks to Kolínský, *Report from the Gallows* was not Fučík's only writing in Pankrác. From the outset he clearly wanted to try to crystallize his thoughts on literature, especially Czech literature. He was not only a journalist, but also an outstanding authority on literature and the theatre. He wrote dozens of literary and theatre criticisms, articles on literary history and studies. In 1940, for example, an essay was published under his own name on Božena Němcová, author of *The Grandmother*, one of the great works of classical Czech 19th century literature, in which he analysed her personality and work.

At the end of the 1930s, when there was a need to strengthen Czech national consciousness, Fučík dedicated himself to a number of authors, including the founder of modern Czech democratic journalism– Karel Havlíček Borovský, who had been interned by the Austrian police after the defeat of the 1848-49 revolution at Brixen in the Tyrol, where he produced his best poems, which were published posthumously. Fučík refers to Havlíček's work at this time as "heroic". But, in Fučík's view, to have written in such circumstances was heroism. And to have written as

forcefully as Havlíček did while he was at Brixen required "enormous inner strength and loyalty to ideas."

This was Fučík's opinion at the end of the 30s, but he was not to know that soon he would find his own inner strength and loyalty to ideas tested, and that he too would stand the test. "Because death is simpler than you think, heroism has a face without a halo." And "...the struggle is even crueller than you assumed."

Even in prison Fučík thought about literature. He tried to crystallize his knowledge in an essay which he called *On the Character of Czech Literature*. He signed the manuscript with the letter "L" and dated it–like his *Report*–spring 1943, but he never finished it. It remained a fragment, albeit highly interesting and promising. It was in no way easy to write about literature without having a single book or text to hand. To have to rely purely on memory.

And so it was that in Cell No.267 another handwritten text began to emerge in the period between April 13 and June 9 of 1943 at the latest, each of the 167 pages of manuscript signed with the letter "R". Fučík's *Report from the Gallows* is testimony about the part and stage of the anti-fascist struggle in which he himself was involved. For Fučík writing in "time stolen from death" meant that he would not die completely, without trace, in the white Cell No.267. The pencil and paper which Kolínský and Hora gave him excited him like "first love". "...I feel more than I think, I dream more than I arrange words and sentences...", wrote Fučík in a note accompanying the first page of his thoughts on Czech literature, dated 28 March 1942, addressed to Gustina and given to her after the war.

Inevitably, circumstances influenced the concept and resulting form of Fučík's *Report*. Nevertheless the text of the manuscript flows and is almost without crossings-out. It is unaffected by involuntary interruptions.

The book has the hallmarks and character of documentation. It does not of course address today's reader merely as a document, but, as indicated above, as a literary work. Fučík never hid his desire to write *belles lettres*. On 16 March 1939, the day after the Nazis occupied Bohemia and Moravia, he left half-written his first autobiographical saga *The Generation Before Peter*. This too, of course, remained a fragment, like other of his manuscripts.

The last 16 of the 167 pages of the *Report* are dated 9 June 1943, which was the last day of his imprisonment in Pankrác. On June 10, along with Klecan and Lída Plachá, Fučík was taken away for trial in Germany. From June 11 to August 24 they were held in a prison in the town of Bautzen and on August 25 they were tried in Berlin. Fučík was condemned to death for "treason" for organising the Czech intelligentsia, which "had striven to restore the Czech Republic" and "seriously damaged the Reich's war effort".

Klecan was also condemned to death regardless of the fact that it was he who betrayed many of Fučík's fellow-resistance workers to the Gestapo. He was condemned as "the centre's link" to the illegal committee of the Czech intelligentsia. Thanks to the statements made by both men, Lída Plachá was freed, but nevertheless she was sent to a concentration camp.

Fučík and Klecan were executed in the prison at Berlin-Plötzensee on 8 September 1943.

Fučík's account of events and the people involved had to be quickly brought to an end on the eve of his transportation to Berlin. So Fučík included the information that, after seven weeks of silence, he had decided to "talk". He had begun to "put on a show" for his interrogators. He tried to divert their attention away from Czech cultural personalities suspected or even accused of cooperating with the illegal National Revolutionary Committee of the Intelligentsia. The answer to the question of how he "talked", Fučík wrote, could be found in the records of his interrogators. But it was mainly life itself which confirmed it: the poets Jaroslav Seifert, later a Nobel Prize laureate, Vítězslav Nezval, S.K.Neumann and František Halas and the writer Ivan Olbracht escaped arrest and survived the war.

We are talking about a passage which took up several pages of Fučík's manuscript and which were omitted from the original 1945 edition. There were various reasons for this, but they are difficult to understand today. The fact that when the first edition of the *Report* was being prepared–in the summer of 1945–Fučík's claim could not be verified was undoubtedly one reason. Another was the fear that Fučík's decision "to talk" might be misunderstood and misrepresented.

The omission of these passages was clearly ill-considered and unfortunate. It was not appropriate, given Fučík's own stand and the message of his book.

The passages in question were also omitted from subsequent editions. The first full version of *Report from the Gallows* appeared in 1994 in the Czech edition published by Orego, and this was followed by a critical and annotated edition published in 1995 by Torst. These editions only confirmed what a reading of Fučík's work, undertaken without prejudice, political motives or personal grudges, had suggested long before: that the author of *Report from the Gallows* was the journalist, theatre and literary critic and historian Julius Fučík. An anti-fascist, and above all a communist.

In the book Fučík gives his vision of a free world. In the words which, according to Lída Plachá, he used when defending himself before the Nazi court in August 1943: "Your verdict will be read to me now. I know it will decree 'the death of a human being'! My verdict on you was brought in long ago... Death to fascism! Life to a human being! The future is communism!"

Fučík's *Report* has become rooted in the maternal ground of Czech culture. Written in fragmented moments, when the hangman had turned his head, it is, as one Czech writer (Karel Konrád) put it, "a work the like of which does not exist in the whole of world literature."

It is in its way an apotheosis. The apotheosis of humanity. Clearly, strictly and programmatically formulated in the form of a call, Fučík appeals through it to future generations. In simple words, as relevant and meaningful today as then: No more fascism!

September 2000

ON FUČÍK'S REPORT

Fučík's widow Gusta during a 1972 meeting with Fidel Castro.

FIDEL CASTRO, President of Cuba :

"You can ask what it was that gave such immense strength to Julius Fučík, what gave him the strength, courage, stature and ability, even in a prison cell, to

write the beautiful *Report from the Gallows*, which shook our world and inspired the revolutionaries who also inspired us, the Cuban fighters, and everyone who read the *Report* and took it as their model in order to strengthen their spirit when face to face with the danger of the struggle."

(1972, in a speech at Charles University, Prague)

PABLO NERUDA, Chilean poet and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971:

"We writers of today have a great responsibility and I want to emphasise it: We live at a time which in literature will be known tomorrow as 'the Fučík period', a period of simple courage. There is perhaps no greater and simpler work (than *Report from the Gallows*), and none was written in such horrifying conditions." *(1950)*

WILLY BRANDT, German Chancellor:

"Charles IV, Jan Hus, Comenius or the historian Palacký, Albert Stifter, Sigmund Freud or Karl Kautsky, or the great and difficult figure of Kafka, the Prague-born Bertha von Suttner, who long before the outbreak of the first big world conflagration bravely spoke out for peace, and the writer Julius Fučík, who became a symbol of resistance to terror and violence – these are just a few of the names which mean as much to our countrymen as to you."

(1973, in Prague at the signing of the Treaty on Mutual Relations between the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany)

KAREL KONRÁD, Czech writer:

"Perhaps my friends among poets and writers, as well as the professional aesthetes, will be kind enough to forgive me: this book will outlive us all. Because it is a work the like of which does not exist in the whole of world literature: it was written on the execution block, and in moments snatched when the executioner had turned away."

(28 October 1945, in *Rudé Právo*)

One of these mountains in Central Asia (4,010m) was named after Fučík.

JIŘÍ HÁJEK, Czech literary historian:

"Unlike (Czech) petty-bourgeois alibi-ism, whose watchword was that the (second world) war would

not depend on us, that the great and the powerful would decide its fate and that the only remaining wisdom was to cower and await the outcome, they, with the heroes of Fučík's *Report from the Gallows*, accepted their full responsibility for the history of Europe, for humanity and progress and themselves became a great, timeless literary symbol of awareness of this responsibility."

(1983, in *Notebooks of a Journalist*)

KURISU KEI, Japanese writer and translater:

"The *Report* is not only a unique document, in which the author describes his most recent experiences in the anti-Nazi resistance, which he also continued in prison, but it is also written in a style similar to that of a prose poem. I am always moved when I re-read it. Spell-bound, I have devoted myself to studying and translating it ever since 1952, when I published my first translation for Japanese readers."

(1995, in the Japanese journal *Syuppan Nyusu*)

ULRICH SCHNEIDER, German historian:

"This work expressively combines opposition to fascist domination with an account of the courage and resilience shown in the anti-fascist struggle. It is literary testimony to the struggle against fascism, which also remains important in the 21st century."

(2000, from the afterword to the new German edition of *Report from the Gallows* published by Paul-Rugenstein, Bonn)

Fučik in Moscow with the celebrated Czech actor Jan Werich (right) and the composer Jaroslav Ježek (left).

JAN WERICH, Czech actor:

"Dear Mrs.Fučík,

Thank you for the book. I think that Juley wrote the most beautiful book of the war. Will it be translated? The whole world should read it–and certainly it would read it."

(1945, in a letter to Gusta Fučík)

KEY BOOKS

Julius Fučik

Report from the Gallows

with an introduction by

JAMES ALDRIDGE

KEY BOOKS

FACSIMILE OF THE FIRST ENGLISH EDITION OF THE REPORT

JULIUS FUČÍK

REPORT FROM THE GALLOWS

The first uncut English-language edition

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Look, my play is also
approaching its end.
That's something I haven't
yet written. That's something
I don't yet know. It's no longer a play.
It's life.
And in life there are no spectators.
The curtain goes up.
People, I have loved you. Be on your guard!

9. 6. 1943